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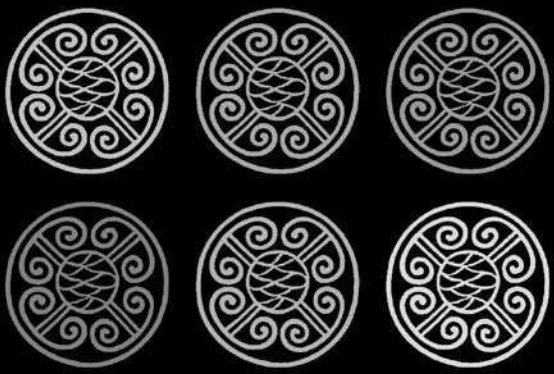
Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History



BY

HUBERT SEIWERT

IN COLLABORATION WITH MA XISHA

BRILL CHINA STUDIES

POPULAR RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND HETERODOX SECTS IN CHINESE HISTORY

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

For Bärbel, Anne, and Eva

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FOREWORD

Plans for writing this book sprang up more than ten years ago when a scholarship of the Volkswagen Foundation allowed me to do research in the First Historical Archives in Peking. During these months, Professor Ma Xisha of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy for the Social Sciences kindly offered me his help. I profited immensely from his stupendous familiarity with the documents of this archive and other sources on the history of popular sects in Ming and Qing China. During our conversations first plans were made for a joint publication. It was again the Volkswagen Foundation that made it possible for Ma Xisha to spent one year as a visiting scholar at the University of Hannover to continue our cooperation and prepare the publication of a monograph on Chinese popular religious sectarianism. During this time Ma Xisha wrote a substantial Chinese draft providing copious historical data to be complemented by the results of my own research. Had I been able to work continuously on this project and to finish it within the planned time, the result would have been a book coauthored by Ma Xisha and me.

Yet, events took another turn. Writing a book in English proved to be a heavy exercise for me that required much more time than I had anticipated, while teaching and other obligations left little room for writing during university terms. In 1992, when I had finished the first version of several chapters, Ma Xisha's and Han Bingfan's *Zhongguo minjian zongjiao shi* (*History of Chinese Popular Religions*) appeared, which contained most (and much more) of the historical information of Ma Xisha's draft. As this monumental publication of almost 1500 pages provides copious quotations from archival sources unknown to me before, I had to reconsider and revise my manuscript. In 1993 I received a call to the University of Leipzig. Moving with my family to this stimulating city in former East Germany, which at that time was in a rush of transformation, and to work at a time-honoured university undergoing complete restructuring was a fascinating but demanding experience. Writing, however, went slowly and first doubts came whether I would ever be able to finish this book within the next years. Then, in 1996, I was appointed expert member of an Enquête Commission of

the German *Bundestag* to investigate the activities of so-called sects and cults in Germany. Until late 1998 this task absorbed my time and energy, and research on Chinese sects came to a standstill. The experience of this commission did, however, help me to understand how state officials with an average amount of prejudices perceive odd religious minorities. This understanding was useful for the evaluation of reports by Chinese officials on popular sects.

When after the Enquête Commission I resumed work on the present book, the project had turned from a dream to a nightmare. In 1994 and in 1999 two large collections of *baojuan* had been published in Mainland China and in Taiwan. Thus, a huge number of first-hand sectarian scriptures were made available, most of which I knew only from quotations. Though it was illusionary to study thoroughly these scriptures, I had to consider at least those that seemed most important. Whole chapters had to be completely rewritten. Progress was despairingly slow until in 2001 I was granted one term sabbatical leave, which against all apprehension finally allowed me to complete the manuscript.

As has been explained, this book owes much to Ma Xisha. I have to thank him for his cooperation and encouragement, without which I would not have envisioned this project. It depends to a great extent on his research, even if in some cases I did not share his views. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for the mistakes and shortcomings of this book.

Guo Peihong has translated large parts of Ma Xisha's handwritten Chinese draft into German and assisted in many other ways during the early phase of the project. Raik Zillmann's skill at computers rescued me from complete despair when he succeeded in recovering the destroyed files of the manuscript. I want to thank them both. I am also grateful to my colleagues in the Institute for the Study of Religions at Leipzig University for their understanding and support when I had less time for the affairs of the institute than was probably needed. The Volkswagen Foundation has supported this project with a considerable grant that allowed not only Ma Xisha to spent one year in Hannover and me to work in Peking for seven months; it also made it possible to purchase the sources and other books needed for the research. I have to thank the Foundation for this grant and for its patience when the promised results were long delayed. Patricia Radder of Brill Academic Publishers was fast and extremely efficient in considering the manuscript

and preparing the final steps for the publication. I am grateful to her and the series editors for accepting the book. I am also indebted to Lynne Miles-Morillo who has edited the manuscript.

Most of all I want to thank my wife for her unceasing encouragement and understanding. Although work on this book occasionally strained the tolerance of my family, she read and corrected the final version of the manuscript. Above all, however, her love and supportive spirit enabled me to overcome the many downs that I experienced not only while working on this book. The past fourteen years were a time of intense activity for both of us. It was also a time of important changes, most of them pleasant. When we went to Peking in 1989, our daughter Anne was one year old; Eva was born in 1991. Now both are in their teens. I have to apologize to them if their childhood was sometimes lacking the attention of their father they were justified to expect.

CONVENTIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Conventions

Italics

Italics are used for

— expressions in languages other than English, unless they have been adopted in the English language. If they are written with diacritics they are always regarded as foreign expressions.

— titles of books and scriptures

— the titles and designations of deities, unless they can be identified as names of (alleged) human persons. For example: "*Laozi*" refers to the book of *Laozi,* while "Laozi" refers either to the legendary person or the deity Laozi. The same deity is also known as *Taishang Laojun.* Designations such as *Wuji shengzu* or *Wusheng Laomu,* which can be translated, are not considered to be proper names but titles or concepts. Sanskrit names of deities are always considered proper names.

— the Chinese names of religious sects and movements (for example *Taiping dao, Wudoumi dao, Huangtian jiao*). It is often unclear whether these expressions are proper names or descriptive terms.

Italics are <u>not</u> used for

— proper names (of persons, places, dynasties, and so forth)

— the names of reign eras.

Translations of sect names and book titles

Unless there are established and unequivocal translations, the names of religious sects and the titles of scriptures are usually not translated, allowing clear identification. A translation is given in parentheses on first occurrence in the main text.

The translation of sect names and Chinese expressions can also be found in the index, the translation of book titles in the bibliography of sources.

Page numbers

— References to page numbers of publications and source editions with Western-style pagination are preceded by "p." or "pp."

— If the page number of Western-style pagination is followed by "a", "b", or "c", it refers to the different sections on the pages in some source editions.

— References to Chinese-style pagination are given as numbers (without preceding "p.") followed by "a" or "b", which refers to the *recto* or *verso* of the leaves (or the right and left side in modern facsimile reprints).

Historical dates

In the main text years are given according to Western chronology. In the notes sometimes the Chinese chronology of the sources is given, that is, the name of the reign era followed by the year, the month, and then (in some instances) the day. ("Hongwu 3/6" thus means sixth month of the third year of the Hongwu era, "Hongwu 3/6/5" means fifth day of the sixth month of the third year of the Hongwu era.) The year according to Western chronology is then added in brackets, for example Hongwu 3/6 (1370). As a convention, the whole year of the Chinese calendar is referred to by the number of the corresponding year of the Western calendar, although the eleventh and twelfth month often fall into the next year of the Western calendar.

Abbreviations

BJCJ: Baojuan chuji 寶卷初集. Vols. 1–40. Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin cubanshe, 1994.

DZTY: Ren Jiyu, ed. 任繼愈. *Daozang tiyao* 道藏提要. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991.—The number after DZTY refers to the number in this catalogue.

j.: juan 卷 ("scroll"), refers to the traditional numbering of "volumes" or "chapters" in Chinese books.

JJCLFZZ: Junjichu lufu zouzhe 軍機處錄副奏摺 (Records attached to memorials of the Grand Council, First Historical Archives Peking).

Ma/Han: Ma Xisha, and Han Bingfang 馬西沙 幹秉方. *Zhongguo minjian zongjiao shi* 中國民間宗教史. Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1992.

MJZJ: Ming Qing minjian zongjiao jingjuan yu wenxian 明清民間宗教經卷與文獻—*The scripture and literature of popular religion in the Ming and Qing dynasty* [!]. Vols. 1–12. Taibei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1999.

T: Refers to the number of the scripture in *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō.*

Taishō: Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō 大正新修大藏經. Vols. 1–100. Tokyo: Issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1934.

WWDZ: Daozang 道藏. Vols. 1–36. Beijing/Tianjin: Wenwu chubanshe, Tianjin guji chubanshe, 1988 (1992).

WXZJ: Wanzi Xuzangjing 卍續藏經. Vols. 1–151. Taibei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1993.

ZPZZ: Zhupi zouzhe 朱批奏摺 (Memorials presented to the emperor, First Historical Archives Peking).

Short and variant titles of Chinese sources are listed in the bibliography.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The sequence of chapters of this book roughly follows chronological order from antiquity to the nineteenth century. My research interest in popular religious movements in China developed, however, in the reverse order. I first noticed the importance of religious communities outside the structures of official Buddhism and Daoism when I did research into the religious history of Taiwan more than twenty years ago. I realized that what during the nineteenth century was considered to be lay Buddhism, in Taiwan were in fact vegetarian religious groups deriving from traditions that on the Chinese mainland were regarded as heterodox sects. In Taiwan, however, few sources were found indicating that these groups suffered from persecution. They rather appeared to have been a generally accepted part of the local religious culture.[1] Some years later, I turned again to these vegetarian societies to trace their earlier history in southern China.[2] I gained the impression that popular religious sects were a significant part of religious culture during the Ming and Qing dynasties, in any case much more important than it appeared in most descriptions of Chinese religious history. This impression was supported when I met Professor Ma Xisha who informed me about his own research and directed my attention to the countless documents in the First Historical Archives in Peking dealing with popular religious sects. I developed the idea of a monograph on Ming and Qing sectarianism based on archival materials and sectarian *baojuan* literature that would combine the approaches of the pioneer books by Susan Naquin and Daniel Overmyer.[3] Since it proved to be illusionary to give a comprehensive description of popular religious sects in late

[1] Cf. Hubert Seiwert, *Volksreligion und nationale Tradition in Taiwan. Studien zur regionalen Religionsgeschichte einer chinesischen Provinz* (Münchener Ostasiatische Studien; 38), Stuttgart: Steiner, 1985, pp. 161–194.

[2] Cf. Hubert Seiwert, "Popular religious sects in south-east China: Sect connections and the problem of the Luo Jiao/Bailian Jiao dichotomy," *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 20 (1992), pp. 33–60.

[3] Cf. Susan Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China. The Eight Trigrams uprising of 1813*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1976; Susan Naquin, *Shantung rebellion. The Wang Lun uprising of 1774*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1981. Daniel Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist religion. Dissenting sects in late traditional China* (Harvard East Asian Series; 83), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.

imperial China, I intended to treat various aspects in a more systematic way to illustrate their place in Chinese religious culture. It was again Ma Xisha who convinced me that the sectarian movements of the Ming and Qing dynasties should be understood against the background of a long history of popular sectarianism. Thus, the scope of research was further extended to the past and the book now includes a description of popular religious movements prior to the Ming, that is, from the Han to the Yuan dynasties. This first part is intended as a historical introduction designed to illustrate the continuities in Chinese religious history and to show some persisting factors in the religious culture.

For a number of reasons, which are explained in the foreword, the original collaboration with Ma Xisha did not lead to a joint publication. In 1992, Ma Xisha and Han Bingfang published their monumental *History of Popular Religions in China*, which made the results of Ma Xisha's research generally accessible.[4] It should be stressed, however, that this book would not have been possible without the collaboration with Ma Xisha. Although the final result is different from what we originally envisioned and its shortcomings are due to my own deficiencies, it owes more to his contributions than can be expressed in the notes.

It is not easy to define exactly the subject matter of the present study. Every single word of "popular religious sects" or "popular religious movements" is open to discussion. The same is true for such notions as "heterodox" and "orthodox". It appears, however, that in historical descriptions using these terms usually does not cause serious difficulties or misunderstandings. It is, therefore, not necessary to start with a precise definition of these terms, for it will be sufficiently clear to which kind of phenomenon they refer. In any case, if we consider the religious situation in Ming and Qing times, a difference between popular religious movements and sects on the one hand and the established forms of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism on the other seems to be evident. For the latter were not only tolerated by the state and the ruling elites but in many ways supported, even if they were also controlled by state legislation. The former, however, were not only not supported but outlawed and often repressed or persecuted by the authorities. We may call religions that are supported by the state "orthodox", and those that are repressed "heterodox". It is evident that in late imperial

[4] Ma Xisha, and Han Bingfang 馬西沙 幹秉方, *Zhongguo minjian zongjiao shi* 中國民間宗教史, Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1992 (1453 pages).

China these heterodox religious movements and sects did not participate in the religious discourses of the elites. If the complement to *elite culture* is *popular culture*, these heterodox religious movements were *popular* religious movements. For most practical purposes these distinctions are clear enough, although they cause considerable problems if we discuss them in more detail.[5]

Some of these problems appear when we turn to earlier periods of Chinese history. Even Confucianism was not a state-supported orthodoxy from its beginning, and the early history of Daoism and Buddhism saw their repression and persecutions. Thus, the distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy can hardly be applied without hesitation. Similarly, early (and later) Daoism and Buddhism did not unambiguously belong to the elite culture but had many manifestations that would be regarded as being part of the popular culture. The terminology is, therefore, not unobjectionable; it has to be taken as a working tool and not as a set of theoretical concepts.

In the following I shall give a short overview over the main parts of this book. Some readers will not have the time or interest to read it as a whole and this summary may help them to select certain chapters. The book is divided into two parts of unequal length with the first part dealing with popular religious movements before the Ming dynasty, and the second, larger part sect movements of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The eighth chapter presents systematic interpretations of the developmental dynamics of popular religious movements.

Chapters one to three of the first part could be summarized as the emergence of orthodoxy and heterodoxy in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Since there is no heterodoxy without orthodoxy and vice versa, the history of heterodox religious movements cannot be separated from the formation of orthodox traditions. To define orthodoxy amounts to the exclusion of other forms of religion that are not granted official support. The transformation of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism into orthodox religions implied their purification of certain elements unacceptable to the ruling elites. Most conspicuous was the attempt to eliminate millenarian beliefs in impending changes of the present condition and to keep a distance from popular cults suspected of opposition to the existing political rule. The basic structure

[5] Some theoretical thoughts about the distinction between popular and elite culture are presented in the epilogue.

of this process can be observed as early as in Han Confucianism whose millenarian elements were gradually eliminated from the orthodox teaching and survived only in popular traditions.

Much more evident, however, is the process of purification in the formation of orthodox Daoism. The early Daoist movement was heterogeneous and had many points of intersection with religious groups that were heterodox by the standards of the ruling elites. Most prominent in this regard is Zhang Jiao's *Taiping dao* (Way of Great Peace) in the second century. It clearly belonged to a religious tradition very similar to Zhang Lu's *Tianshi dao* (Way of the Heavenly Masters), which later was regarded as the origin of the Daoist religion. Zhang Jiao's *Taiping dao,* however, was excluded from the pedigree of orthodox Daoism since it was involved in the rebellion of the Yellow Turbans. The evolution of Daoist orthodoxy was a process that left behind as heterodox many religious groups that belonged to the same religious milieus in which the Daoist movements originated. Up to the early fifth century a considerable number of popular sects emerged in this milieu before Daoism gained a clear identity as an orthodox religion marked by a corpus of canonical scriptures and state-supported institutions. This close relationship between popular sects and the early Daoist movement is described in chapter two.

The third chapter deals with heterodox movements in the context of medieval Buddhism. Again, the label "heterodox" must be understood as a complement to the evolving Buddhist orthodoxy. If state support and acceptance by the intellectual elites were to be gained and maintained, the Buddhist community had to avoid any impression of being associated with religious groups that for some reason were objectionable to the political authorities. From the fifth century onward, however, Chinese religious culture was increasingly dominated by Buddhist ideas and institutions. Buddhist influence, therefore, also affected popular sects that were beyond the control of the *saṃgha.* In these milieus, millenarian and eschatological beliefs, which were part of popular religious traditions, combined with Buddhist beliefs and symbols. Occasionally, Buddhist monks became the leaders of millenarian movements, which sometimes started open rebellion. To defend the status of state-supported orthodoxy, the clerical elites had to draw a clear line of separation from such sectarian groups. As in the case of Daoist orthodoxy, the formation and definition of orthodox Buddhism thus

implied the exclusion of certain religious groups and movements as heterodox.

By the Song dynasty, Daoism and Buddhism were clearly established as orthodox traditions. There remained, however, an undercurrent of popular religious movements that were not treated as orthodox but criticized by officials and clerics alike, and often outlawed by the government. Some of them were at the margins of the orthodox traditions, while others had quite distinct features. The fourth chapter describes popular sectarianism during the Song and Yuan dynasties. It focuses on the interaction between popular religious movements and orthodox Buddhism. The best known examples of popular religious movements during this period, the White Lotus and the White Cloud traditions, both originated in a completely orthodox Buddhist milieu. Both, however, were finally labelled heterodox. While the processes that induced these changes are not entirely clear, it seems that they were connected with the proliferation of other popular sects that caused the suspicion of the authorities and prompted a policy of repression. The boundaries between various sects often were permeable and they influenced each other. Towards the end of the Yuan dynasty extensive sectarian networks developed that brought together groups belonging to a common sectarian milieu. These developments culminated in the so-called White Lotus rebellion that finally led to the end of the Yuan and the founding of the Ming dynasty.

The second and main part of the book is devoted to the new religious movements that emerged since the middle of the Ming dynasty. In several respects these new religions were different from popular sects of earlier periods. Most conspicuous is the formation of a distinct literary tradition known as *baojuan* (precious scrolls) literature. These *baojuan* were often printed and widely distributed, and they offer first-hand information on sectarian beliefs, organizations, and history. Although many of these scriptures have been destroyed, the number of still existing *baojuan* is immense, and their study will be a task for generations of scholars.[6] These rich sources are complemented by in-

[6] Until some years ago the study of *baojuan* was confined to a small number of scholars who had access to these rare books. During the past decade, however, a significant number of *baojuan* has been made available in two modern collections: *Baojuan chuji* 寶卷初集 (A first collection of *baojuan*), edited by Zhang Xishun, et al. 張希舜, vols. 1–40, Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1994 and *Ming Qing minjian zongjiao jingjuan yu wenxian* 明清民間宗教經卷與文獻—*The scripture and literature of popular*

formation contained in memorials presented to the emperor by Qing officials, which are stored in historical archives in Peking and Taipei. Taken together, these and other sources allow to draw a picture of Ming and Qing sectarian movements that is far more detailed than all we know about popular sects in earlier times. On the other hand, this richness of sources precludes any attempt to present a comprehensive description of Ming and Qing sects. I have, therefore, selected a limited number of popular religious movements to illustrate certain aspects of late imperial sectarianism.

One of the best-known popular religious movements, and certainly the one on which most research has been done, is the tradition traced back to Patriarch Luo, who lived in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. I have described this movement in the fifth chapter to demonstrate the unfolding of a sectarian movement. Patriarch Luo was the author of several scriptures that exerted great influence on Ming and Qing sects. Many of them transmitted Luo's *Five Books in Six Volumes* (*Wubu liuce*) and venerated him as their founding patriarch. Even at an early stage of its history, however, the Luo movement ceased to be a unified organization and developed into different traditions that were virtually independent of each other. Furthermore, these groups interacted with other sectarian traditions, adopting beliefs and practices not found in Patriarch Luo's original teachings. These developments exemplify a general tendency of sect development: the emergence of new sectarian groups through schisms of existing sects and the homogenization of beliefs as a result of mutual influence.

Patriarch Luo's writings are the first case of sectarian scriptures with a known author. They are not, however, the first known *baojuan*. Two sectarian *baojuan* that were published before Luo's *Five Books in Six Volumes* are discussed in the sixth chapter. They show that the spectrum of sectarian beliefs in the fifteenth century was much broader than Patriarch Luo's teachings. Many themes and symbols that became part of the evolving sectarian tradition are already attested in these early scriptures. In contrast to Luo's writings, which are dominated by Buddhist symbols, these scriptures show a marked influence of Daoist ideas and practices. Affinity to the Daoist tradition is also evident in

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religion in the Ming and Qing dynasty, edited by Wang Jianchuan and Lin Wanchuan 王見川 林萬傳, vols. 1–12, Taibei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1999. For a catalogue of existing *baojuan* see Che Xilun, ed. 車錫倫, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* 中國寶卷總目, Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, 1998. The catalogue lists 1579 titles.

the writings of two sects that originated in the late sixteenth century, the *Huangtian jiao* (Yellow Heaven Teaching) and the *Hongyang jiao* (Vast Yang Teaching). I have used some *baojuan* of the *Huangtian jiao* to illustrate the difficulties in interpreting sectarian scriptures. It is argued that they often contain multiple layers of meaning that allow different interpretations depending on the cultural and social background of readers and their understanding. Thus, the symbol of the Unborn Mother, which became central in most sectarian traditions, can at the same time refer to a personal deity or to an impersonal principle representing the source of all being and the realm of no-birth-and-death. Through the meditative practices of inner alchemy this ultimate reality can be experienced, which may be symbolized as union with the Mother. If we consider these hidden levels of meaning, which are often coded in mythological language, sectarian teachings appear in a new light.

Like the *Huangtian jiao,* the *Hongyang jiao* (Vast Yang Teaching) shows the influence of Daoist ideas and practices. At the same time, however, scriptures of the *Hongyang jiao* reveal the impact of Patriarch Luo's writings. The section on the *Hongyang jiao* is therefore used to illustrate the evolution of a common sectarian tradition that transcended the boundaries of individual sects. By the late Ming dynasty, *baojuan* scriptures formed a literate tradition of its own whose works mutually influenced each other. As a result many beliefs and symbols were shared by different sects and spread within the common sectarian milieu. This tendency towards homogenization was fostered by the exchange of personnel. Individuals often shifted alliance from one teacher or community to another and thus came into contact with various traditions.

The spectrum of popular religious teachings in late Ming can to some extent be marked by the relative influence of Buddhism and Daoism. In this view, the Luo teaching represents a popular tradition shaped primarily by Buddhist ideas and symbols, while the *Hongyang jiao* and *Huangtian jiao* are closer to the Daoist pole of the religious space. The last section of this chapter deals with the *Sanyi jiao* (Three-in-One Teaching), which originated in a Confucian milieu. Its further development, however, exemplifies the gradual movement within the religious space that brought it closer to the Buddhist pole. Although its Confucian origin was never ignored, the teachings and internal organization of the *Sanyi jiao* increasingly approached the patterns of other

popular sects. The section on the *Sanyi jiao* is, therefore, taken to illustrate the interconnection of different social and religious milieus.

Chapter seven of the second part concentrates on sectarian developments during the Qing dynasty. During this period the number of popular sects grew considerably and their mutual relationship became still more complex. To reduce the complexity only a few historically significant sect traditions are considered in some detail. They serve as examples to explain two major tendencies of development: homogenization and diversification of sectarian traditions. Homogenization has already been observed with the late Ming sects. During the Qing, this tendency continued and was intensified. As an example the first section of this chapter investigates the *Longhua jing* (*Dragon-Flower Scripture*), which was published shortly after the fall of the Ming dynasty. The *Longhua jing* represents a scriptural synthesis of late Ming sectarian beliefs. It explicitly refers to most known earlier sects and their scriptures and thus gives evidence of a common sectarian tradition. As many other *baojuan*, the *Longhua jing* has different layers of meaning with tales about divine beings as the narrative frame and a more subtle message of salvation through inner cultivation and meditative practices. The sectarian milieu in which the *Longhua jing* originated was marked by close interaction of various sectarian groups that formerly belonged to the extended network of the Wang family in Shifokou.

The formation of sectarian networks with hereditary leadership was a common phenomenon for which many examples will be given in this book. It certainly was a factor contributing to the homogenization of sectarian beliefs and practices. On the other hand, there were strong schismatic tendencies, that is, the separation of certain groups from their parent organization, which accounted for the proliferation of sects. Since individual groups had to respond to the religious and social expectations of their members, they emphasized different aspects of the sectarian tradition depending on their social composition. Homogenization did, therefore, not exclude diversification.

During the Qing dynasty the history of popular sects was strongly affected by the official policy of repression and persecution. The effects of this policy were manifold and did not always conform to the intentions of the imperial government. The disintegration of large sectarian networks, which was the main objective of government measures, resulted in a fragmentation of sectarian groups, which became the starting point of new organizations. Furthermore, the policy of repression nour-

ished anti-Manchu feelings. To some extent, therefore, the government policy produced what it wanted to avoid: popular sects being involved in political resistance and open rebellion. In the second section of this chapter these processes are illustrated with two sectarian networks founded in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The section concludes with a short description of the prehistory of the *Yiguan dao* (Way of Penetrating Unity), which exemplifies the close interaction of various traditions, their homogenization, and the diversification of sectarian groups.

The eighth and last chapter is designed as a systematic analysis of the dynamics of popular religious movements during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It summarizes the interpretations developed in the preceding chapters in a more theoretical way. First, however, the question of historical continuity and religious innovation is discussed: Does the emergence of new religious movements during the Ming dynasty mark a new epoch in the history of Chinese religions, or should they be regarded as the continuation of popular religious traditions deeply rooted in Chinese religious culture? The main part of the chapter then analyses the processes leading to the formation of sectarian movements, the factors influencing their development, and the forces accounting for certain changes during the Qing dynasty. The theoretical background of these interpretations is based on Rodney Stark's and William Bainbridge's rational choice approach to religion.[7]

Theoretical questions of another kind are the focus of the epilogue, which considers the position of popular religious movements in Chinese religious culture. In this context the concepts *popular* and *elite culture* are discussed with the intention of gaining a less static view of Chinese religions than can be found in most descriptions. It is argued that religious life takes place in a cultural space of symbols and ideas that allows a great variety of combinations. These clusters of symbols and ideas—for which both the literate traditions of the Three Teachings and popular religious traditions are examples—are not static but continuously rearranged. In this view the distinction between popular and elite culture and their religious manifestations needs to be reconsidered. More than offering solutions, the epilogue presents some thoughts and

[7] Cf. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A theory of religion*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996 (Original publication: New York: Lang, 1987).

concepts that may contribute to the understanding of the internal dynamism of Chinese religious culture.

PART ONE

POPULAR SECTS AND HETERODOXY BEFORE THE MING DYNASTY

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INTRODUCTION

From the high middle ages, that is, the Tang dynasty (618–907), the three great intellectual traditions Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism have all been orthodox in the sense that they were accepted and supported by the ruling elite. They usually enjoyed considerable official patronage. This support could vary according to the personal preferences of emperors or officials, but it usually secured them a respected position within society. The Confucian literati were the reservoir from which the political elite was recruited, and the leading Buddhist monks and Daoist priests entertained intimate relations with that elite. Even if members of the political and intellectual elites differed in their religious inclinations, they shared the same cultural values and respected the same social norms.

Not all Buddhists or Daoists, however, belonged to the upper level of society. There were other monks and priests—and they represented the majority—who were not well educated and culturally sophisticated, but lived among the common populace making their living by offering all kinds of religious and magical services. Their social status was rather low and the Confucian literati usually despised them. Although most of them still could be regarded as belonging to the orthodox traditions, some others propagated teachings that were not approved by those who were nearer to the centres of political power. Thus, even within the traditions of Buddhism and Daoism there were strands with an odour of heterodoxy, much to the embarrassment of the advocates of orthodoxy who were anxious not to endanger their official support.

If we go further back in history to the early middle ages we can see that this official support of Daoism and Buddhism was by no means a matter of course. Many religious groups and practices that were later denoted as Daoist had not only been the targets of criticism and disdain by the Confucian literati, but were occasionally closely connected with social turmoil and rebellions. In order to secure official patronage the more elitist Daoists had to draw a sharp line between themselves and the various popular cults with which they shared more than they would admit. Also the Buddhists had to strive hard before they finally reached the status of a privileged religion. They had to face the suspicion and

jealousy of the Confucians and Daoists who competed with them for imperial favour. Occasionally this led even to persecutions, which for the Buddhists were traumatic experiences. Both Daoists and Buddhists were well aware that imperial recognition and protection could be won and lost and that the status of orthodoxy demanded a clear separation from everything suspected of being opposed to the normative conceptions of the political elite.

Thus, the familiar situation of the three traditions, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, sharing in common the status of orthodox teachings did not exist right from the beginning. Instead, it was the end-result of a historical process that brought about the formation of orthodox religions and philosophical schools. In some way this formation of orthodoxy was a prerequisite to the development of heterodoxy. In fact, the establishment of orthodox traditions was concomitant with the debarring of heterodoxy. In the following chapters I will consider some elements of this development. It will show that religion from the Han dynasty on developed a social dynamism that led to the formation of religious congregations and movements. The forces of religion were partially domesticated by the formation of orthodox, state-controlled forms of Daoism and Buddhism. There remained, however, a religious undercurrent of popular traditions that had its own dynamism and escaped the control of the state and the official clergy. It was a sectarian milieu that produced independent religious organizations. Although most groups were only short-lived, there is a continuity of certain ideas and symbols. Most conspicuous are millenarian and eschatological beliefs about the coming of a new time of peace and justice. As we shall see immediately, these ideas were deep rooted in history and left their traces even in Confucianism.

CHAPTER ONE

PROPHECIES AND MESSIANISM IN HAN CONFUCIANISM

If any intellectual tradition in China could claim to represent the standard of orthodoxy, then it certainly was Confucianism. However, even in this case it should not be overlooked that the position of a state-supported teaching and ideological foundation of the Chinese empire had been reached only centuries after the foundation of the Confucian school by Confucius (551–479 BCE). During the Warring States period (403–221 BCE), when several states competed for supremacy, the Confucian school was one among many different traditions that had evolved after the middle of the Zhou 周 dynasty (c. 1100–221 BCE). Since at that time China was multicentred not only politically but also culturally, there was neither orthodoxy nor heterodoxy, each state having its own local traditions and each ruler applying his own policy, choosing his advisers according to his personal inclinations. It was only after the empire was united by the First Emperor of the Qin 秦 dynasty (221–206 BCE) that unification in the field of ideology became a state affair.

The First Emperor, Qin Shihuangdi 秦始皇帝, tried to install a unified and centralized empire. He set up norms regulating various aspects of the social and economical life of the country. Not only did he fix such practical matters as the gauge of carriages, but he tried also to control religious cults and matters of ideology. His policy was based on the political theories of the Legalist school that, accordingly, became what could be called the first example of a state orthodoxy in Chinese history. Incidentally, the Confucian school, which later assumed this privilege and kept it until the end of the Chinese empire, was perceived as a principal rival to the official ideology by the Qin emperor and thus suffered severe suppression. In other words, Confucianism was regarded as a heterodox teaching.

It was only after the founding of the Han 漢 dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) that Confucianism gained its position as the custodian of what was now regarded as the classical heritage of Chinese culture. The political turmoil attending the rise and fall of the Qin dynasty and the

oppression that the Confucians had suffered during that period gave them a strong feeling of a definite break with the past. The "victory of Confucianism" during the Han dynasty was not a mere continuation of the Confucian tradition as it had developed during its formative period. It brought about the reformulation and canonization of that tradition. This process reached a certain conclusion only in the second century CE.

We do not need to describe in detail the transformations of Confucianism during the Han dynasty. Suffice it to remember the leading role of Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (c. 179–c. 104 BCE), who was the most prominent of the Confucian scholars during the Former Han. It was partly due to his influence that emperor Wudi 武帝 (r. 141–87 BCE) made the Confucian teachings the principal subject taught in the imperial academy founded in 124. Confucianism became the ideological foundation of the Chinese empire. The Confucian ideas of cosmological and social order became the legitimation of the political power of the emperor, and it was Confucian scholars who organized and reformed the state cult as the ritual expression of this order.

What is more important in the present context are the conflicts that existed within the Confucian tradition during the Han. For Confucianism was far from being a homogeneous tradition when it started its history as a state-supported teaching. The scholars of the Former Han dynasty (220 BCE–23 CE) regarded as Confucians were influenced by a variety of traditions, including the speculative cosmology of the *Yin-yang* school, the *Huang-Lao* teachings, and even Legalism. Dong Zhongshu was the figurehead of the New Text School (*jinwen xue* 今文學), one strand within Confucianism that was much influenced by the cosmological speculations of the *Yin-yang* school.[1] He regarded the whole cosmos as being shaped by the interaction of *yin* and *yang* and preordained by the sequence of the Five Agencies (*wuxing* 五行). Much stress was laid, therefore, on the interpretations of omens by which historical changes and the fate of dynasties could be anticipated. The influence of the New Text School reached its climax when Wang Mang 王莽 ascended the throne to found his short-lived Xin 新 dynasty (8–23 CE). Wang Mang styled himself as the realization of the Confucian

[1] For Dong Zhongshu cf. Shan-yu Yao, "The cosmological and anthropological philosophy of Tung Chung-shu," *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 73 (1958), pp. 40–68.

dream of a sage-emperor taking over the mandate of heaven and replacing a failing dynasty.[2]

However, the reforms, which Wang Mang had set up according to the cosmological theories of the New Text School, proved to be ineffective and resulted in a complete failure of his political measures. After that, the idealism of the New Text School gradually lost its vigour. The belief in omens and the prognostic *Chenwei* 讖緯 texts, which had been highly esteemed by the New Text School, more and more fell into discredit among Confucian scholars although it still was in vogue at the imperial court. In the first and second centuries the New Text School, which after Dong Zhongshu had been the orthodox interpretation during the Former Han, was eventually replaced as the dominant form of Confucianism by the Old Text School (*guwen xue* 古文學), which was rather sceptical of all things supernatural.[3]

There is an intimate connection between the formation of a Confucian orthodoxy on the one hand and the creation of a Confucian canon on the other. As the names of the two main rivals, the New Text School and the Old Text School, indicate, texts played a prominent role for the delineation of certain intellectual positions and schools. Even during the later Zhou dynasty, the formation of the Confucian school had led to the selection of a set of texts as authoritative writings. This selection, which was attributed to Confucius, was more than the mere transmission of ancient records, for it implied the excision or expurgation of certain texts. The resulting collection became the canonical scriptures of the Confucian school.[4] By the Han dynasty the Confucians had established their reputation of being the custodians of the sacred tradition of the sages of antiquity.

When during the Qin dynasty the Confucian school became the object of repression, its texts were confiscated in much the same way as were later the writings of heterodox sects. Thus, after the fall of this

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[2] Cf. Michael Loewe, "Confucian, Legalist, and Taoist thought in Later Han," in *The Ch'in and Han empires, 221 B.C. - A.D. 220*, edited by Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (The Cambridge History of China; 1), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 766–807.

[3] Cf. Robert P. Kramers, "The development of the Confucian schools," in *The Ch'in and Han empires, 221 B.C. - A.D. 220*, edited by Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (The Cambridge History of China; 1), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 747–766.

[4] Cf. John B. Henderson, *Scripture, canon, and commentary. A comparison of Confucian and Western exegesis*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, pp. 27 f.

notoriously anti-Confucian dynasty, the Confucian canon had to be restituted from the different versions that had survived the literary inquisition of the Qin. It was in that context that the controversy between the New Text and the Old Text schools occurred, the latter claiming to be in possession of some older parts of the canonical writings. As has been noted before, the differences between the two schools implied much more than merely the correct textual transmission. It is significant, however, that this question became the token of their conflict of interpretations. Thus, when on the advice of Dong Zhongshu and other Confucian scholars emperor Wudi established chairs for the study of the five main texts (*Yijing, Shijing, Shujing, Liji,* and *Chunqiu*) in 136 BCE, this not only meant the official recognition of the Confucian teachings as authoritative, but at the same time also supported the interpretations of the New Text School.

The transformation of Confucianism into state orthodoxy entailed the fixing of a canon that became the main authority by which the standards of orthodoxy were defined. Conflicts between schools within the Confucian traditions took the form of different interpretations of the canonical writings. New ideas were expressed mainly in the form of commentaries to the authoritative texts. During the Han dynasty, therefore, a rich literature of commentaries and explanations of the classics was produced, expounding the divergent interpretations of the different schools. It was in that context that probably during the first century BCE new scriptures emerged, which are summarily known as *Chenwei* scriptures. The *Wei* 緯 texts styled themselves as complementary writings to the classics containing their esoteric meaning, while the *Chen* 讖 texts consisted of predictions and oracles that were derived from these esoteric interpretations. Together they represented a type of scripture that made Confucianism an esoteric teaching by which the rise and decline of dynasties could be prognosticated. Therefore, the ruling classes took considerable interest in these writings.[5]

When exactly the *Chenwei* literature appeared for the first time is a matter of dispute. As it was highly esteemed by the proponents of the

[5] For the *Chenwei* texts cf. Tjan Tjoe Som, *Po Hu T'ung. The comprehensive discussion in the White Tiger Hall*, vols. 1–2 (Sinica Leidensia; VI, 1–2), Leiden: Brill, 1949–52., vol. 1, pp.100–120; Jack L Dull, *A historical introduction to the apocryphal (ch'an-wei) texts of the Han dynasty*: Ph.D. thesis, University of Washington, 1966; Chōhachi Itano, "The t'u-ch'en 圖讖 prophetic books and the establishment of Confucianism (I), (II)," *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko (The Oriental Library)*, 34 (1976), pp. 47–111; 36 (1978), pp. 85–107.

New Text School and represents a kind of thinking which was popular as early as the second century BCE, it might be that it originated at that time, although the name *weishu* does not appear in the biographical chapter of the *History of the Han*.[6] Anyway, Wang Mang's usurpation of power relied heavily on prognostications of that kind and probably also on the fabrication of omens by which his rule was declared as preordained by the will of Heaven. The emperors of the Later Han dynasty continued that practice and used the *Chen* and *Wei* scriptures to give the ruling house of Liu a position of sanctity that put it beyond any mundane reproof. However, during the following two centuries the orthodox New Text School lost its intellectual vigour until it finally perished with the end of the Later Han in the early third century.[7]

After Wang Mang's failure many Confucian scholars turned away from this kind of esoteric interpretation, which had proved to be so unreliable. The religious and supernatural aspects, which the New Text School had brought into the Confucian teaching, were eliminated by the proponents of the Old Text School. These scholars did not accept the *Chenwei* texts as authoritative interpretations of the hidden meaning of the classics. After the fall of the Later Han, these texts gradually came into disuse among Confucian scholars. The use of the *Chenwei* was forbidden in 282 by the Jin 晉 emperor Wudi 武帝,[8] and in 485 emperor Xiaowendi 孝文帝 of the Northern Wei 北魏 dynasty (386–534) ordered the prognostic *chen* texts to be burned because they were regarded as heterodox (*yaoxie* 妖邪).[9] Proscriptions were repeated under the Sui (581–618), Tang (618–907) and later dynasties, but at that time the original *Chenwei* texts of the Han probably did not exist any more. Thus, the emergence of the new Confucian orthodoxy, which replaced the Han orthodoxy of the New Text School, resulted in the elimination of a significant portion of scriptures that had been highly esteemed by Han Confucians. In this way Confucianism was

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[6] Cf. Tjan Tjoe Som, *Po Hu T'ung*, vol. 1, pp. 100–102; Kramers, "Development of the Confucian schools", p. 759.

[7] Chi-yun Chen, *Hsün Yüeh (A.D. 148–209): The life and reflections of an early medieval Confucian*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 16.

[8] *Jinshu* 晉書, by Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974 (1993), *j.* 3, p. 56.

[9] *Weishu* 魏書, by Wei Shou 魏收, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974, *j.* 7A, p. 155.

purged of many of the supernatural elements still present during the Han dynasty.

One of these elements, which gave Han Confucianism a particular religious flavour, was the expectation of a sage-emperor who would realize the coming of a new era in which the world will enjoy peace and prosperity. These ideas were not confined to the Confucians of the New Text School but were widespread among different schools of the Former Han. Especially the *fangshi* 方士 ("master of recipes," "magicians"), who were closely related to the Huang-Lao teaching, promoted the idea of a golden age that would be inaugurated by an emperor who responds to the cosmic order by enacting the proper rituals and cultivating his personality.[10] Confucian scholars of the Former Han shared these ideas. They seem to have been inspired by a prophecy already alluded to in the Book of *Mencius*, namely the appearance of a sage every five hundred years who would transmit the true teaching and thereby restore order to the world.[11] The Han emperor Wudi apparently referred to this tradition when he deplored the fact that for five hundred years the erudites had not been able to bring back the principles of the ancient kings.[12] Wudi regarded himself as the one who should reinstall the cosmic order and become the sage-emperor preordained by Heaven. This is the background of the various ritual measures that he enacted during his reign.[13]

The expectation of a sage-emperor who would bring about the ideal state of the world that supposedly had existed in high antiquity occupied the thought of the New Text scholars. It was this same expectation on which Wang Mang relied when he styled himself as the fulfilment of this expectation. Thus, the historical and political theories of Former Han Confucianism contained an element that could properly be called *Confucian messianism*. This Confucian messianism, of course, was intimately related to the belief in prophecies and omens popular with the New Text School. Following the failure of Wang

[10] Cf. Anna K. Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao Tseu dans le Taoïsme des Han* (Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient; 71), Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1969, p. 25.

[11] *Mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯注, *Jin xin zhang ju* 盡心章句, *xia*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960, vol. 2, p. 344.

[12] *Hanshu* 漢書, by Ban Gu 班固, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962 (1975), *j.* 56, p. 2496.

[13] Cf. E.B. Ord, *State sacrifices in the Former Han dynasty according to the official histories*, Ph.D. thesis, University of California, 1987, pp. 112 ff.

Mang's rule it lost much of its appeal and was eventually suspended. After the Han, messianic expectations no longer played a prominent role within the Confucian tradition.[14]

To summarize: The new Confucian orthodoxy, which emerged with the end of the Han dynasty was the end-result of a historical development that eventuated a thorough reformulation of the Confucian tradition of the Former Han. One aspect of these changes was the definition of a set of canonical writings. The dispute between the New Text and the Old Text Schools about the correct transmission of the classical texts was finally settled when in the year 175 emperor Lingdi had the Old Text versions of the Five Classics engraved into stone tablets that were erected in front of the imperial academy "for the whole empire to take them as standard."[15] Subsequently these texts formed the core of the Confucian canon and the yardstick of orthodoxy until, during the Song dynasty, they were supplemented and overshadowed by another set of authoritative writings.

Another aspect of the changes caused by the new Confucian orthodoxy was the elimination of certain elements that had been prominent until the first century. This affected a whole genre of literary works, the *Chenwei* texts with their explanations of the hidden meaning of the Classics, their prognostications, and prophecies. Closely related to these "apocrypha" were the messianic elements within the Confucian tradition, which were likewise dismissed. In this way, the purging of the Confucian tradition not only resulted in the definition of a new orthodoxy of texts and concomitantly of authoritative interpretations; at the same time it defined certain elements that had been part of the tradition as deviations from the authoritative norms, stigmatizing them as heterodox. As has been mentioned, the *Chenwei* texts of the Han dynasty had been materially destroyed by the seventh century, much in the same way as the writings of heterodox sects in later times have suffered confiscation and destruction.

The unfolding of a new Confucian orthodoxy during the Later Han demonstrates the dialectical relationship between heterodoxy and

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[14] Hu Shi has argued that the expectation of an ideal king who would appear every five hundred years was a tradition that can be traced back to prophecies popular among the people of the Shang. Cf. Hu Schï, "Der Ursprung der Ju und ihre Beziehung zu Konfuzius und Lau-dsï. Mit Genehmigung des Verfassers übersetzt von Wolfgang Franke," *Sinica Sonderausgabe* (1935; 1936), pp. 141–171; 1–42.

[15] *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, by Fan Ye 范曄, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965 (1982), *j.* 79A, p. 2547.

orthodoxy: Setting up normative standards of texts and interpretations is tantamount to rejecting what is not in accord with them. Establishing orthodoxy means delimiting heterodoxy. Among the elements excluded from the new Confucian orthodoxy after the Han were the most characteristic features of the New Text School, which had been authoritative during the greater part of the Han dynasty. What once had been orthodox was later considered heterodox.

Another point to be noted here concerns the issues eliminated from the new Confucian orthodoxy: the prophecies and prognostications of the *Chenwei* texts and the messianic expectations of a sage-ruler who would bring about peace and prosperity and inaugurate a new era. These were the same issues that were characteristic of many popular religious movements that became the objects of repression and persecution. And the same elements can be found also in the Daoist and Buddhist traditions where they suffered a similar fate of being eliminated when it came to the definition of the respective orthodoxies.

CHAPTER TWO

POPULAR SECTS AND THE EARLY DAOIST TRADITION

From the Han dynasty, Confucianism was the tradition that most clearly represented the fundamental political and social values on which the Chinese political order was built. The officially accepted forms of Confucianism, its regulations of the state sacrifices and its moral principles were the ideological foundations of all dynasties after the Han. Confucianism was supported by the state, and insofar it can be regarded as orthodox. It defined the fundamental norms of behaviour sanctioned by the political authorities. Only within this normative frame could religions such as Daoism and Buddhism unfold as orthodox teachings. In the middle of the first millennium both religions had succeeded in gaining official recognition by eliminating or controlling those elements of their traditions that were not in accord with the officially sanctioned norms. Thus, they became orthodox traditions, too.

1. Roots of the Daoist Tradition

In some respects the formation of Daoism as an orthodox religion is comparable to the development of Confucianism during the Han. It included the integration and systematization of various traditions culminating in the definition of a corpus of canonical texts recognized by the emperor. During this process many elements that originally were part of the Daoist traditions were eliminated. These early Daoist traditions derived from many sources. Although the name "Daoist school" (*daojia* 道家) was already in use during the Han dynasty, it was only centuries later that Daoism became a clearly defined religious tradition. The various streams that contributed to this movement were only slowly integrated. During the Han dynasty many of them still flowed separately.

Looking back from what was later regarded as Daoism, we can discern some elements that reach back to pre-Han times. These include the name of Laozi 老子 as the paragon of the Daoist tradition,

the search for longevity and immortality, cosmological speculations, and the role of religious practitioners known as *fangshi* or *daoshi* 道士 (masters of the *dao*).

Laozi, the legendary author of the *Daode jing* 道德經 (*Classic of the Dao and De*), was during the Han dynasty transformed into a divine being. Veneration of Laozi seems to have been widespread as early as the second century BCE. At the court of emperor Jingdi 景帝 (r. 156–141 BCE) were several masters of the Huang-Lao 黃老 teaching, which appealed particularly to the empress Dou 竇. During that time the book of *Laozi* received the name *Daode jing* and was thus honoured as a canonical scripture (*jing* 經). The Huang-Lao teaching derived its name from Huangdi 黃帝 (Yellow Emperor) and Laozi who was regarded as his teacher.[1] Laozi had already been transformed into a semi-divine mythological figure. Huangdi, the mythical first emperor who was said to have followed the teachings of Laozi, was the paradigm of the ideal ruler. Under his government the world experienced peace and prosperity and for himself he had reached immortality. Small wonder, therefore, that emperor Wudi (r. 140–89 BCE) aspired to follow the example of Huangdi. Although in the political realm he promoted Confucianism, his search for immortality brought him under the influence of several *fangshi* ("masters of recipes"), who prompted him to perform the famous *fengshan* 封禪 sacrifices as Huangdi had supposedly done. Thus, the Huang-Lao teaching, which was the most important stream of Daoism during the Former Han, contained from the beginning a political as well as an individual orientation. Politically it stimulated the hope for an ideal government while individually it promised personal well-being and immortality. Both elements had lasting influence on the Daoist tradition.

During the Han dynasty, however, the Huang-Lao teaching was not yet an organized religious movement comparable to the later Daoist communities. It was rather a diffused religious tradition that permeated the society on various levels. When in 165 CE emperor Huandi 桓帝 inaugurated state sacrifices for Laozi and thus officially recognized him as a deity, the cult of Laozi had already a long history among the populace. What is more, the Huang-Lao teachings were also followed by Zhang Jiao 張角 (also pronounced Zhang Jue[2]), who in 184 started

[1] Cf. Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao Tseu*, pp. 24 f, p. 50.

[2] In most Western works the pronunciation *Jue* (meaning a note in traditional Chinese music) is preferred to the more common reading *Jiao* (meaning "horn"). I

the notorious rebellion of the Yellow Turbans. Veneration of Laozi and his exaltation as a deity were not confined to particular social circles. They were popular in the upper strata of society as well as in lower class milieus. There was no coherent Huang-Lao teaching but rather a set of religious motifs and ideas used in different contexts. Still less was there a single organization of the Huang-Lao tradition. "Daoism" was at that time far from being a clearly defined religious movement.

The search for immortality did not belong to the original teachings of Laozi as we know them from the *Daode jing*. It sprang from a different source that can be traced back to religious traditions prevalent in the northern coastal regions. As early as the fourth century BCE the kings of Qi 齊 and Yan 燕 had sent expeditions in search of the islands of the immortals.[3] The First Emperor of the Qin dynasty was much attracted to the idea of gaining immortality and spent considerable effort to reach this aim. He engaged specialists from Yan who practised the methods of the *fangshi* and immortals (*fangxian dao* 方僊道). The teachings and practices of the *fangshi* from Yan and Qi contained many elements that later became essential parts of the Daoist tradition. Among them is the idea of leaving the corpse and attaining a transformed immortal body (*xing jie* 形解).[4] The *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Historian*) further mentions that the *fangshi* had assimilated the cosmological theories of Zou Yan 騶衍 (305–240 BCE ?) who was a native of Qi. Zou Yan had systematized the widespread theories about the functioning of *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 and the operation of the Five Agencies (*wuxing* 五行).[5] His teachings became very popular during the Han dynasty and influenced not only the emerging Daoist tradition but also the Confucian schools.

By the time of Han Wudi the belief in the possibility of becoming an immortal had already been combined with the veneration of Huangdi, the Yellow Emperor, who was said to have ascended to heaven riding

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could not find any reason for this. I did, however, find evidence that at least during the Song dynasty the name was pronounced *Jiao*. There are accounts about a certain religious sect that avoided pronouncing the word *jiao* (referring to the horn of an ox) because of a taboo on Zhang Jiao's personal name (see below p. 192, note 76).

[3] *Shiji* 史記, by Sima Qian 司馬遷, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959 (1972), *j.* 28, pp. 1369 f.

[4] *Shiji, j.* 38, p. 1368 f. The technical term in later Daoism is *shijie* 尸解 ("leaving of the corpse"), which is without doubt the same idea as *xing jie* ("leaving of the visible appearance").

[5] *Shiji, j.* 28, p. 1369.

on a dragon. The propagators of these teachings at the court of Wudi were *fangshi* from Qi.[6] The repeated reference to the *fangshi* in these contexts shows that the search for immortality was not confined to emperors such as Han Wudi and Qin Shihuangdi but belonged to a deep-rooted tradition transmitted by the *fangshi* in northeastern China. The *fangshi* were skilled in many arts that later became characteristic for the *daoshi*, the "masters of the *Dao*". These include the practice of alchemy, which is reported of the *fangshi* Li Shaojun 李少君 at the court of Han Wudi.[7] Another *fangshi* from Qi was able to call the spirits of the dead. Emperor Wudi was much impressed by his art and honoured him with an official title.[8] Even if he was later executed because he had fabricated an alleged supernatural scripture discovered in the belly of an ox, it gives an impression of the variety of practices used by the *fangshi*. The revelation of scriptures later became an important feature in the Daoist tradition.

In many respects the *fangshi* can be regarded as the forerunners of the *daoshi*, the Daoist priests. Beginning in the Later Han dynasty, the two terms were occasionally used interchangeably. Many of the *fangshi* mentioned in the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (*History of the Later Han Dynasty*), such as Zuo Zi 左慈 and Hua Tuo 華佗, were included in the registers of Daoist immortals.[9] During the Han dynasty, however, the tradition of the *fangshi* was far from being unanimously approved. Their occult arts were sharply opposed by Confucian scholars at the court of Han Wudi. The *fangshi* had their roots in the popular religious traditions where practices such as calling spirits and exorcising demons were common. Even the later Daoists sharply criticized these practices and regarded them as heterodox. The Confucian scholars objected to the *fangshi*, not only because they were competitors for imperial favour, but certainly also because they were able to attract many followers by their arts. Thus, they represented a latent threat to political stability. Sometimes they acted as soothsayers, giving prophecies that could encourage political revolts.[10] After Han Wudi the political influence of

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[6] *Shiji, j.* 28, pp. 1393 f.

[7] *Shiji, j.* 28, p. 1385.

[8] *Shiji, j.* 28, pp. 1387 f.

[9] Cf. Kenneth J. deWoskin, *Doctors, diviners, and magicians in ancient China: biographies of fang-shih* (Translations from Oriental Classics), New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, pp. 83–86, 140,152.

[10] See e.g. *Hou Hanshu, j.* 20, p. 740. In 26 CE a *daoshi* prophesied that the

the *fangshi* in the upper levels of society was considerably reduced but they still represented a vigorous current in the popular religion. When the emerging Daoist religion took over the tradition of the *fangshi*, it had to be purged from many elements considered heterodox before it could attain recognition as an orthodox religion.

2. New Developments during the Han Dynasty

So far we have considered the continuity between the evolving Daoist tradition and ancient beliefs and practices of pre-Han times. However, during the Han dynasty there were some important new developments that affected the formation of the Daoist religion. The latter part of the Han dynasty saw the emergence of a new type of religion characterized by a novel perception of human existence. This new type became most obvious with the arrival of Buddhism. Although the full reach of the Buddhist teaching was understood in China only in the course of time, its promise of salvation fell on the fertile soil of a widespread longing for relief from the present state of existence.

The development of Daoism in some respect parallels that of Buddhism. Both religions mutually influenced each other, by borrowing ideas, ritual practices, and literary styles, by sharpening the distinctive features to define their respective identity. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the appearance of salvationist elements in Daoism could alone be attributed to the influence of Buddhism. The idea of salvation from the present conditions could gain prominence only in a climate where these conditions were felt to be in some way deficient. This religious climate did not arise suddenly but developed during the Han dynasty, and it was not confined to Daoist circles.

There is some evidence that at the beginning of the Han dynasty many contemporaries perceived the state of society as being in need of reform. The collapse of the Qin dynasty had nourished the consciousness of a break in history and the urgency of a new beginning. Teachers of various backgrounds offered their advice on how the state should be ordered. The repeated attempts to reorganize the state cult during the Former Han attest to the feeling that the order of things needed some readjustment. They thus reflect this quest for a new beginning. As

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prefect Zhang Feng 張豐, "who was fond of the arts of the *fangshi*", would become emperor. Zhang Feng then started a rebellion.

early as the reign of emperor Wendi 文帝 (r. 179–157 BCE) there were discussions among scholars about the beginning of a new epoch dominated by the virtue of Earth instead of Water, which had dominated the Qin dynasty.[11] The same feeling of an imminent change still prevailed half a century later when emperor Wudi decided to ritually enact this symbolic change, which his great-grandfather had avoided. In 105 BCE Wudi performed the great *feng* and *shan* sacrifices following the example of the Yellow Emperor, changed the colours of the dynasty and inaugurated a new era, significantly entitled "Great Beginning" (tai chu 太初). However, the expected signs of a golden age did not appear and the Confucian scholars concluded that the time was not yet ripe for the advent of a sage-ruler.[12]

The teaching of Gan Zhongke (first century BCE)

The expectation of a saint who would bring peace and prosperity was the background of the "Confucian messianism" discussed in the preceding chapter. Expectations of this kind were, however, by no means confined to the Confucians. In his endeavour to restitute the ideal government of the Yellow Emperor, Han Wudi was prompted as much by the ideas of the *fangshi* as by those of the Confucians. The demand for a change in the actual conditions reflected an awareness of disorder that must have been widespread during the Han dynasty. Towards the end of the first century BCE a revealed scripture was circulated saying that the mandate of the Han dynasty had declined and needed restoration. The ill-fated emperor Aidi 哀帝 (r. 7–1 BCE) was convinced by this teaching and tried to change the course of events by starting a new era named "Principal Leader of the Great Beginning" (*taichu yuanjiang* 太初元將) in the year 5 BCE. At the same time he adopted the title "August Emperor of Great Peace of the Most Saint Liu Family" (*Chensheng Liu Taiping Huangdi* 陳聖劉太平皇帝).[13] These measures show once more the perception that a new beginning was needed. And the title the emperor assumed shows what kind of change was hoped for: He

[11] *Hanshu, j.* 25 A, 1212 f. See also the remarks in *Lunheng jijie* 論衡集解, by Wang Chong 王充, in *Zengbu Zhongguo sixiang mingzhu* 增補中國思想名著, vol. 23–24. Taibei: Shijie shuju,1967, *j.* 19, pp. 388 f.

[12] Cf. E.B. Ord, *State sacrifices*, pp. 117–123; Michael Loewe, "The Grand Beginning - 104 BC," in *Crisis and conflict in Han China 104 BC to AD 9*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1974, pp. 17–36.

[13] *Hanshu, j.* 11, p. 340.

styled himself as emperor of the Great Peace (*taiping* 太平). *Taiping* or "Great Peace" was to remain for two thousand years a keyword for all who aspired to a new world where all deficiencies of the present time would be suspended.[14]

The persons who had convinced emperor Aidi belonged to a group of people who for many years had propagated their ideas. They believed that the state of the world had deteriorated to such a degree that a fundamental change was needed. During the reign of emperor Chengdi 成帝 (r. 32–7 BCE) the leader of this group, a man named Gan Zhongke 甘忠可, had presented a scripture entitled *Scripture of the Great Peace Maintaining the Origin according to the Calendar of the Heavenly Officers* (*Tianguan li baoyuan taiping jing* 天官曆包元太平經). Gan Zhongke claimed that the text and its teachings had been transmitted by the "accomplished man" (*zhenren* 真人) *Chijing zi* 赤精子 (Master of the Red Essence) who had been sent by the Emperor in Heaven to reveal to him "this *dao*." However, Gan Zhongke was accused by the Confucian scholar Liu Xiang 劉向 of deceiving the authorities and seducing the people through false talks of ghosts and gods and was put into jail where he died. It was Gan Zhongke's disciple Xia Heliang 夏賀良 who later succeeded in convincing emperor Aidi to start a new beginning. Although he was opposed by Liu Xin 劉歆, Liu Xiang's son, because his teachings were not in accord with the Five Classics, the desperate emperor believed in his millenarian teachings. Xia Heliang's success was only short-lived, however. For when the health of the ailing emperor deteriorated again, his Confucian advisers could induce him to cancel his former measures; Xia Heliang was executed, while his followers were exiled to Dunhuang.[15]

This case exhibits several traits that later became typical for heterodox sects. Like many sect founders of the Ming dynasty, Gan Zhongke claimed to be in possession of a revealed scripture that became the focus of his teaching. He gathered a following that did not dissolve after his death but transmitted his book and his teachings. We may take it as a sect in the nascent state. That it was heterodox is obvious, because the teachings were denounced on the ground that they did not agree with the canonical scriptures of the Confucians. This is quite understandable considering that Gan Zhongke preached the imminent

[14] For an overview see Werner Eichhorn, "T'ai-p'ing and T'ai-p'ing Religion," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* 5 (1957), pp. 113–140.

[15] *Hanshu, j.* 75, pp. 3192–3194.

end of the present order that could only be avoided by following the *dao* revealed by the Master of the Red Essence, *Chijing zi*.[16] Furthermore, he was accused of seducing the people by propagating a heterodox teaching (*zuodao* 左道) and thereby causing political disorder. These are all charges that occur time and again in later sect history. The case further shows, however, many characteristics of the later Daoist tradition. Gan claimed to possess a book revealed by Heaven through a divine emissary, which became a standard motif of the Daoists. Moreover, the title attributed to *Chijing zi*, the divine messenger, sounds distinctly Daoist: He is a *zhenren*, an "accomplished man," which later was a usual designation for Daoist immortals. The name *Chijing zi* appears in later Daoist scriptures as one of Laozi's transformations.[17] Finally, the scripture revealed through him is a *Taiping jing* 太平經 (*Great Peace Scripture*) and so bears the name of one of the most famous scriptures of the later Daoist religion. We are justified, therefore, in regarding Gan Zhongke's following as the first known case of a religious sect with a Daoist mark. There is no evidence, however, that it survived as a religious association, although Gan Zhongke was clearly been able to attract a number of followers and to spread his teachings. Still, the repeated occurrence of a book called *Taiping jing* during the Later Han dynasty shows that the tradition represented by Gan Zhongke's sect continued even after the execution of his major disciples.

It is very probable that Gan Zhongke's sect was related to the *fangshi* of the northeastern regions. He was himself a man from Qi. His proposal to start a new beginning for the sake of the emperor and the dynasty was similar to what the *fangshi* at the court of Wudi had done. And even the use of books of supernatural origin is a feature that we have met already in the circles of the *fangshi* a century before Gan Zhongke. The main difference between the events at the courts of Wudi and Aidi was that Wudi was a vigorous emperor who believed that he was predestined to become the expected saint ruler. Aidi, on

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[16] *Hanshu, j.* 75, p. 3192. Gan Zhongke declared on the basis of his scripture: "The house of Han is facing a closing period of the cosmos (*tiandi zhi da zhong* 天地之大終) and must have its mandate renewed by Heaven. The emperor in Heaven has sent the accomplished man *Chijing zi* down to earth to teach me this truth (*ci dao* 此道)."

[17] Cf. Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao Tseu*, p. 66, referring to the *Scripture on the Transformations of Laozi* (*Laozi bianhua jing* 老子變化經), a text that was found in Dunhuang but possibly originated in the second century CE. The information is also given in the *Santian neijie jing* 三天內解經 (DZTY 1195), in *WWDZ*, vol. 28, p. 413c.

the other hand, was a weak and ailing emperor facing the decline of the dynasty and the ruling house. Wudi aspired for a climax of his imperial and personal fulfilment, while Aidi hoped for relief from his personal and imperial malaise. Gan Zhongke and his followers offered their book as a remedy to save the emperor and the dynasty. In this sense the book was a promise of salvation.

The cult of Xi Wangmu (3 BCE)

Two years after emperor Aidi's attempt to change the fate of the dynasty there was an incident that shows that the hope for salvation was not restricted to the ruling family. In 3 BCE the common people of the eastern districts were attracted by a religious movement centred around the cult of the *Xi Wangmu* 西王母 (Venerable Mother of the West).[18] After a great drought in spring the people started processions and offerings in honour of the goddess. The movement rapidly swelled to a religious torrent that overflowed the eastern commanderies and spread to the capital. A religious frenzy arose, the devotees ran through the streets singing, dancing, and beating drums. They offered sacrifices to the Mother and attracted more and more followers. This religious excitement continued during the summer and came to an end only in autumn.[19]

The cult of *Xi Wangmu* had a long and complicated history. During the Han dynasty the goddess was believed to reside in a western paradise where she kept the elixir of immortality. Frescos, bronze mirrors, and stone reliefs showing the image of the Venerable Mother of the West were found in tombs in many parts of China. Although these remains mostly date from the Later Han dynasty, there is no doubt that even in early Han times the goddess was imagined as ruling a realm of immortals. The presence of her image in tombs may indicate the hope that the spirits of the dead should be guided to her paradise.[20]

[18] The name is usually translated as "Queen Mother of the West" or "Mother Queen of the West". According to the ancient dictionary *Erya* 爾雅 (third century BC) the term *wangmu* 王母 designates one's father's mother (*Erya, j.* 4, p. 40, *Sibu beiyao*-edition, reprint Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989). The commentary explains that she is to be honoured like a king (*wang* 王) and therefore called *wangmu*. It thus was a respectful title for an old Lady. The same connotation we find in popular traditions of the Ming and Qing dynasties where the main goddess is called *Laomu* 老母 ("old," i.e. venerable, "mother"), which is also a term of respect.

[19] *Hanshu, j.* 11, p. 342; *j.* 27 Ba, p. 1476.

[20] Cf. Michael Loewe, *Ways to paradise. The Chinese quest for immortality*, London:

The religious enthusiasm that arose in 3 BCE shows this affinity to death and immortality. The believers carried and distributed inscribed tablets with the message: "The Mother informs all people that those who carry this writing will not die."[21] Thus, the Mother offered her devotees rescue from death. Unfortunately, we do not know many more details about the religious beliefs of this movement. It seems, however, that what people wanted to escape from was not a natural death sometime in the future but imminent death at that very time. For they were frightening each other, leaving their homes, and starting frantic activities. They apparently believed that a great disaster was approaching that would bring death to most people except the devotees. This coming disaster was expressed in the prophecy that "people with upright eyes will arrive,"[22] which probably means an invasion of demonic forces.

This cult of the Venerable Mother of the West shows some traits of an apocalyptic movement. People were already experiencing great misfortune because of the severe drought in that year. This was a fertile soil for prophecies announcing an imminent catastrophe that would victimize most people. Under these circumstances *Xi Wangmu*, ruler of the realm of immortals, was venerated as a goddess who could save the believers from threatening death. As a goddess associated with long life and immortality, *Xi Wangmu* occurs also in the *Taiping jing*,[23] which shows the mutual influence of various religious milieus. Thus, the Venerable Mother had started her long career as a goddess of salvation.

The tradition of the Taiping jing (second century)

It might be a mere accident that the fear of a coming disaster expressed in the cult of *Xi Wangmu* and the expectation of an imminent end of

Allen & Unwin, 1979, pp. 31 f, 119 f. For the tradition of *Xi Wangmu* see Homer H. Dubs, "An ancient Chinese mystery cult," *Harvard Theological Review* 35, no. 4 (1942), pp. 221–240; Lee Rainey, "The Queen Mother of the West: An ancient Chinese mother goddess?" in *Sages and filial sons: Mythology and archaeology in ancient China*, edited by Julia Ching and R. W. L. Guisso, Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1991, pp. 81–100; Suzanne E. Cahill, *Transcendence and divine passion. The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.

[21] *Hanshu, j.* 27 C, a, p. 1476.

[22] *Hanshu, j.* 26, p. 1312.

[23] *Taiping jing hejiao* 太平經合校, edited by Wang Ming 王明, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960, p. 62.

the world in Gan Zhongke's teaching both originated in the northeastern part of China, in present day Shandong province. But it is probably more than mere coincidence that the main actors of the following events stemmed from this same region. During the reign of emperor Shundi 順帝 (r. 126–145) a certain Gong Chong 宮崇 from Langye 郎耶 in the former state of Qi personally went to the court to present a scripture entitled *Taiping qing ling shu* 太平清領書 (*Writing on the Great Peace with Green Headings*). Gong Chong said he had received the book from his teacher Gan Ji 干吉, a man from the same region. The book was criticized by high officials on the grounds that it was heterodox and absurd and contradicted the classical scriptures (*yao wang bu jing* 妖妄不經). Gong Chong was accordingly punished by enslavement.[24]

A few years later, during the reign of emperor Huandi (r. 147–167), Xiang Kai 襄楷, also from the former state of Qi, went to the court and presented two memorials. He admonished the emperor to change his policy, which, as he declared, was responsible for the misfortune of the dynasty. In his memorials he explicitly referred to the divinely revealed book that had been presented by Gong Chong to emperor Shundi. Since Shundi had not accepted these teachings, so Xiang Kai went on, the state fell into chaos and could not prosper, and Shundi's two successors died soon after their installation.[25] Although Xiang Kai asserted that the meaning of Gong Chong's scripture was easy to understand and in full accordance with the canonical writings,[26] he was accused of spreading heterodox doctrines, falsely pretending to possess supernaturally revealed scriptures, and deceiving the authorities. He was imprisoned, but the emperor avoided having him executed.[27]

There has been much dispute among scholars whether the *Taiping qing ling shu* is to be regarded as the original version of the later Daoist scripture *Taiping jing* 太平經,[28] as the commentaries of the *History of the Later Han Dynasty* explain. This question does not need to concern us

[24] *Hou Hanshu, j.* 30 B, p. 1084.

[25] *Hou Hanshu, j* 30 B, pp. 1075–1081.

[26] *Hou Hanshu, j.* 30 B, p. 1081.

[27] *Hou Hanshu, j.* 30 B, p. 1083.

[28] Xiong Deji 熊得基, "Taiping jing de zuozhe he sixiang ji qi yu Huangjin he Tianshidao de guanxi 《太平經》的作者和思想及其與黃巾和天師道的關係," *Lishi yanjiu* 歷史研究, no. 4 (1962), pp. 8–25; Barbara Kandel, *Taiping jing: The origin and transmission of the "Scripture on General Welfare". The history of an unofficial text* (Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Natur und Völkerkunde Ostasiens; 75), Hamburg, 1979; B. J. Mansvelt Beck, "The date of the Taiping Jing," *T'oung Pao*, 66 (1980), pp. 149–182;

here. For the present context it suffices to note that from the first century BCE there were writings with the expression *taiping* 太平 (Great Peace) in their title. These scriptures were transmitted in the northeastern region (present day Shandong province) and we may surmise that they had their origin there. The people who used this scripture or these scriptures were certainly filled with a deep and sincere conviction that they contained a truth revealed by divine beings. They believed that accepting this truth was the only way to save the state and restore order to the world. This deep conviction explains that Gong Chong and Xiang Kai, like Gan Zhongke and Xia Heliang before them, had the courage to present it to the emperor. They all suffered the same fate of being accused and convicted, and they must have known the risk. Xiang Kai in his memorial even blames the emperors for punishing worthy men who had admonished them.

We know near to nothing about the organization of the group to which Gong Chong and Xiang Kai belonged. The *Taiping qing ling shu* had been transmitted through Gong Chong's teacher Gan Ji. This shows that there was a certain continuity in transmission from teacher to disciple. Whether these teachers had attracted a larger following, as in the case of Gan Zhongke's sect, we do not know from the sources. However, we may suppose that people who thought they could convince the emperor had some encouraging experiences in gaining followers. Thus, Gong Chong and Xiang Kai may have been sect leaders, men with considerable self-consciousness and probably social status. For otherwise they would not have been admitted to the court. They did not belong to a marginal religious tradition but were related to the religious mainstream of the time. In Xiang Kai's memorial we find a remarkable passage criticizing the emperor for violating Daoist and Buddhist teachings:

> I have also heard that in the palace offerings for Huang-Lao and Buddha have been installed. This *dao* [deals with] the clear and the void, it respects Not Interfering (*wuwei* 無為), it loves [securing] life and hates killing, it reduces desires and abolishes extravagance. Now Your Majesty has not abolished desires and passions and applies the death penalty exceedingly. If you violate their *dao*, how can you expect to receive their blessing? It is said that Laozi went to the barbarians and became the Buddha. The Buddha did not spend three nights sitting under [the same] mulberry

Jens Østergard Petersen, "The early traditions relating to the Han dynasty transmission of the Taiping jing," *Acta Orientalia*, 50 (1989), pp. 133–171; 51 (1990), pp. 173–216.

> tree, for he did not want to call forth affection [by resting at the same place] for a long time. This is the completion of one's essence. When heavenly deities sent him beautiful maidens as a present, the Buddha said: 'These are just skin bags filled with blood.' He sent them away without giving them a glance. Such was his method of keeping the unity (*shou yi* 守一) by which he could attain the *dao*. Now Your Majesty has lascivious maidens and beautiful ladies, the most attractive beauties under heaven, and your food and drink are the richest and most delicious under heaven. How can you hope to be like Huang-Lao?[29]

This is a forthright critique of the emperor's behaviour that could only be uttered by a man deeply convinced of the truth of what he was saying. And it shows that Xiang Kai's religious views were influenced by the Daoist Huang-Lao tradition, which at that time had already assimilated Buddhist elements. Xiang Kai may have hoped that the emperor would accept his admonitions since Huandi was known to be a devotee of Laozi.[30]

Without any doubt Xiang Kai's teachings were related to the Daoist Huang-Lao tradition. Even if we do not know the exact contents of the *Taiping qing ling shu*, which was the scriptural base of his teaching, we can say that the views Xiang Kai expressed in his memorial can be found in the present *Taiping jing*.[31] There the critique of extravagance and the accumulation of goods is a central issue.[32] This does not necessarily mean that the present *Taiping jing* is the text used by Xiang Kai and his forerunners. It shows, however, that their book and the *Taiping jing* cannot easily be regarded as a piece of propaganda for the ruling Han dynasty.[33] After all, the men who proposed the books to the throne were all punished because the teachings were regarded as heterodox.

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[29] *Hou Hanshu*, *j.* 30 B, pp. 1082 f.

[30] In the year 165 Huandi had sacrifices offered to Laozi. Cf. Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao Tseu*, pp. 36–38.

[31] I refer to Wang Ming's reconstruction: *Taiping jing hejiao* 太平經和校. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960.

[32] *Taiping jing hejiao*, pp. 242 f, 247 f. Cf. Max Kaltenmark, "The ideology of the T'ai-p'ing ching," in *Facets of Taoism. Essays in Chinese religion*, edited by Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 19–52: 33–36.

[33] Cf. K.M. Schipper, "Millenarismes et messianismes dans la Chine ancienne," in *Actes of the XXVIth Conference of Chinese Studies*, Roma, 1978, pp. 31–49: 37 for an opposite view.

It is true, however, that the ideas advanced by Xiang Kai, like those of Xia Heliang, were not revolutionary in the sense that they intended to overthrow the ruling dynasty. What they offered was the teaching of a revealed book that they thought would help the dynasty to overcome the present misfortune. Rescue from the tremendous difficulties that both Aidi and Huandi were facing could only be reached if they changed their policy and followed the true *dao* of the divinely revealed book. This might not be a revolutionary teaching, but neither is it a conservative one. The propagators of these teachings were deeply convinced that they had the only way to change the course of events. They felt that there had to be a fundamental change in the behaviour of the rulers if the disastrous situation of the world was to improve. To convey this message, they had taken risks for their own lives; but they had failed because those in power did not accept the divine admonitions. Under such circumstances some more radical adherents of the movement finally decided to take the rescue of the world into their own hands. The *History of the Later Han Dynasty* draws a direct line from Gong Chong, Xiang Kai, and the *Taiping qing ling shu* to the great uprising of the Yellow Turbans led by Zhang Jiao 張角.[34]

Zhang Jiao's Taiping dao movement (second century CE)

A major problem troubling emperor Huandi was a series of rebellions during his reign.[35] Some of the rebel leaders accepted the title of emperor and seem to have used religious ideas to legitimate their uprisings.[36] It was, however, during the reign of emperor Lingdi 靈帝 (r. 168–189) when the notorious rebellion of the Yellow Turbans broke out in 184. It shattered the dynasty in its foundations. The leader of this rebellion was Zhang Jiao. The *History of the Later Han Dynasty* starts the description of his sect as follows:

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[34] *Hou Hanshu, j.* 30 B, p. 1084. The account of Gong Chong, Xiang Kai and the *Taiping qing ling shu* closes with the remark: "Later Zhang Jiao relied strongly on his [i.e., Gong Chong's] book."

[35] See *Hou Hanshu*, *j.* 7, p. 291 ff. Between 147 and 172 there are about 20 rebellions recorded, almost one a year.

[36] For a summary see Anna Seidel, "The image of the perfect ruler in early Taoism: Lao-tzu and Li Hung," *History of Religions*, 9 (1969/1970), pp. 216–247: 219 f.

> Zhang Jiao from Julu 鉅鹿[37] called himself Great Sage and Virtuous Teacher (*daxian liangshi* 大賢良師). He venerated the *dao* of Huang-Lao and gathered many disciples. [He taught them rituals of] prostration and confessions of sins, of using charm water and incantations to heal sickness. Since he was very successful in healing the sick, the common people believed in him. [Zhang] Jiao had sent eight of his disciples in all directions to teach and transform the world through the good *dao*. Thus [his teachings] were transmitted from one to another and his lies deluded [the people]. Within some ten years the crowd of his followers grew to hundreds of thousands.[38]

This is the first well-documented case of an organized religious sect in Chinese history. It is well documented because Zhang Jiao started the rebellion of the Yellow Turbans and the official histories therefore paid considerable attention to it. We do not know how many other popular sects were active during that time. Certainly, none of them had been able to form a network of connections spreading over eight provinces as Zhang Jiao had done. Zhang Jiao had succeeded in attracting a huge following distributed over large areas in northeast China. Within some ten years, between 173 and 184, he installed a well-organized structure of thirty-six districts (*fang* 方), each under the leadership of a commander. To each district belonged between six and ten thousand sect members.

How could this sect expand in such an amazingly short time? To convert about three hundred thousand people within ten years is an average of three thousand a month. This could not be achieved by gaining proselytes individually. There must have been mass conversions, which are difficult to explain. Following the interpretation of the *History of the Later Han Dynasty* much of the attraction of Zhang Jiao's sect derived from his successful healing practices. This is indeed a good reason to join a sect in a time where other forms of medical care were hardly available to the common people. However, the *Taiping dao* 太平道 (Way of the Great Peace), as the sect seems to have been called,[39] was more than a healing cult. It was a millenarian movement preparing for an approaching new age when the miseries of the present time would be suspended. The slogan they spread through the country was:

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[37] Southern part of present Hebei province.

[38] *Hou Hanshu*, *j.* 71, p. 3299.

[39] *Dian lüe* 典略, commentary to *Sanguozhi* 三國志, by Chen Shou 陳壽, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959 (1982), *j.* 8, p. 264. The name is not confirmed in earlier

"The blue heaven has died and the yellow heaven is about to be established. When the year has reached *jiazi* 甲子, there will be great happiness in the world."[40] They wrote the characters *jiazi* with white chalk at the doors of official buildings in the capital and the prefectures. Accordingly, it was a *jiazi* year (184) when Zhang Jiao started his uprising. And the rebels wore yellow kerchiefs around their heads as a sign of their belonging to the coming rule of the Yellow Heaven (*huangtian* 黃天).

It was a millenarian revolt unprecedented in Chinese history. The rebels commanded armies with several ten thousand men causing the government serious problems that were overcome only after severe battles. There was an enormous loss of life on the side of the rebels after their defeat and most of their forces seem to have been exterminated.[41] The military and political dimension of the Taiping sect should, however, not obscure the fact that it was primarily a religious movement. The majority of the followers cannot have been attracted by propaganda for an armed revolt. Even if this should have been a long-term plan of the leaders of the sect, they certainly did not openly preach it. What they could preach, however, was the millenarian dream of a coming age of peace and prosperity as teachers like Gan Ji and Gong Chong had done before them. Teachings of this kind were not *a priori* subversive but were popular even in elite milieus as early as the Former Han dynasty. Thus the field was well prepared when Zhang Jiao started his missionary work. His great achievement was not to have spread the millenarian expectations of *Taiping* (Great Peace) in the first place, for these expectations were already part of the popular religious culture, but to have channelled these currents into a unified organization. This explains why he could succeed in gathering a large following in such a short time.

Had Zhang Jiao not finally decided to take active measures for the realisation of *Taiping*, his sect would just have been the biggest among the many popular cults of the time. All we know of its teachings and practices fits well into the traditions of the *fangshi* and early Daoism. Thus, ritual healing had been practised in China from time immemorial by popular shamans and priests. Since in popular belief diseases were

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sources.

[40] *Hou Hanshu, j.* 31, p. 3299.

[41] *Hou Hanshu, j,* 31, pp. 2300–2302.

attributed to the evil influence of ghosts and demons, exorcisms played a major role in healing ceremonies. The healing practices of the *Taiping dao* differed from these archaic customs in that they were based on the belief that illness was caused by moral transgressions of the sick person. Therefore the rituals included reflection on one's sins and repentance. Only after that other ritual measures such as drinking charm water and incantations of the deities were used. However, Zhang Jiao certainly was not the inventor of this moral interpretation of sickness. For similar practices were used in other sects, as in the one led by Zhang Xiu 張脩 in western China.[42] Moreover, the theory that all ills had their cause in the moral transgression of men is fully developed in the *Taiping jing*.[43] There we read:

> Now, to remove illness and to give peace to the rulers, Heaven is about to send the Lord of the *Dao* and *De* (*daode jun* 道德君) and to make appear all sages. In this way he will convert the people that they all reflect on their sins to be free from the retribution caused by the faults inherited from their forebears. He directs all men to plan responsibly their own life and orders them not to be negligent in the slightest way. Then there will be great joy in the world[44] and peace will be established.[45]

We do not know if this passage was contained in the version of the *Taiping qing ling shu* that Zhang Jiao knew. However, similar views are expressed often in the *Taiping jing* and they fit well with what we know about Zhang Jiao's sect. For they explain its two central elements: the ritual confessions of sins and the millenarian expectations. As relief from illness, disasters, and social chaos can only be reached if men—and above all the rulers—change their behaviour and follow the moral laws of Heaven, it was so urgent for men such as Gong Chong and Xiang Kai to convert the emperor to this teaching. We can easily understand that the radical wing of this movement concluded that a dynasty unwilling to follow the moral laws of Heaven was leading the

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[42] *Dian lüe* 典略, commentary to *Sanguo zhi, j.* 8, pp. 264.

[43] Cf. Hubert Seiwert, "Health and salvation in early Daoism. On the anthropology and cosmology of the Taiping Jing," in *Self, soul and body in religious experience*, edited by A.I. Baumgarten, Jan Assmann and G.G. Stroumsa (Studies in the History of Religions; 78), Leiden: Brill, 1998, pp. 256–275.

[44] Literally: "in after heaven", *houtian* 後天. This refers to the world after the separation of heaven and earth.

[45] *Taiping jing hejiao, j.* 67, p. 255.

world into a catastrophe.[46] They may have felt to have no other choice than to replace the present rule in order to save the world.

The *History of the Later Han Dynasty* explicitly remarks that Zhang Jiao relied on the *Taiping qing ling shu*, and his teachings obviously agree with the content of the book. Evidently, the *Taiping dao* belonged to the same milieu as Gong Chong's sect, which went back to Gan Ji early in the second century CE. It was part of the Huang-Lao tradition. Zhang Jiao venerated Laozi who at that time had been deified as *Huanglao jun* 黃老君 (Lord Huanglao). Other main deities were *Zhonghuang* 中黃 (Central Yellow) and *Taiyi* 太一 (Great Unity).[47] *Taiyi* was already regarded as the highest deity by the *fangshi* at emperor Wudi's court who had an altar erected for it.[48] But it was also worshipped in the popular Daoist cults of the second century CE. An inscription of the year 165 from Henan refers to people who loved the *dao* and came from far away to venerate *Taiyi*. The sick who purified themselves and prayed were cured, while those who did not believe fell ill.[49] Zhang Jiao's *Taiping dao* likewise started as a healing cult and belonged to a similar religious milieu. Cults of this kind could therefore easily be integrated into his movement, which in this way grew rapidly rather than through the conversion of individuals.

The *Taiping dao* of Zhang Jiao must be regarded as a Daoist sect, if anything at that time can be called Daoist. And it was not an eccentric group, but belonged to the mainstream of early Daoism. However, the later Daoist tradition never accepted Zhang Jiao and his forerunners as one of theirs.[50] In their endeavour to have their religion recognized as an orthodox teaching they had to eliminate their heterodox forebears from its pedigree. Even in the case of the *Taiping dao's* contemporary, the *Wudoumi dao* 五斗米道 (Five Pecks of Rice Sect), they had to purify the tradition from heterodox elements in the ancestry of Daoism.

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[46] The idea of a final catastrophe is expressed in the *Taiping jing* (*Taiping jing hejiao*, p. 221).

[47] *Weishu* 魏書 quoted as commentary to the *Sanguo zhi*, *j.* 1, p. 10.

[48] *Shiji*, *j.* 28, p. 1386. See also *ibid.*, p. 1388.

[49] Seidel: *La divinisation de Lao Tseu*, p. 59 where this inscription is discussed. The source is *Wang Ziqiao bei* 王子喬碑, in *Cai Zhonglang wenji* 蔡中郎文集, by Cai Yong 蔡邕, *j.* 1, 14a-15b, in *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊, vol. 30.

[50] Cf. *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jieke jing* 正一法文天師教戒科經 (DZTY 783), in *WWDZ*, vol. 18, p. 236b, where Zhang Jiao's teaching is called "heterodox" (*xiedao* 邪道).

Popular Daoist movements in southwest China

While none of the sects treated so far has been included by later Daoists into the pedigree of their religion, the Five Pecks of Rice Sect is regarded as the beginning of the Daoist church. However, the early historical records do not give the impression that this sect, which centred in the southwestern regions of modern Sichuan and Shaanxi, differed much from those we have met in the Northeast. Quite the contrary, they assert that the *Wudoumi dao* and the *Taiping dao* were largely similar.[51] Both practised healing through confession of sins and other rituals and both belonged to a tradition that might be called "Daoist", even if they do not seem to stem from the same sectarian lineage. There is no evidence that the *Wudoumi dao* used the *Taiping jing* or a similar scripture[52] and it is not said that it belonged to the Huang-Lao tradition, as in the case of Zhang Jiao's sect. The Daoist flavour of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect is nevertheless evident since in rituals they used the book of *Laozi* in five thousand words.[53] If we rely on the early historical sources, leaving aside the accounts of the Daoist tradition, we must conclude that the *Wudoumi dao* started as just one of many sects flourishing during the second century. Nothing foreshadowed its later prominence as the state supported orthodox tradition of the Heavenly Masters.

According to Daoist historiography the Five Pecks of Rice Sect is the origin of the movement that later was called *Tianshi dao* 天師道 (Heavenly Master Sect) or *Zhengyi pai* 正一派 (Orthodox Unity Sect). It was founded by Zhang Daoling 張道陵 who in 142 CE reportedly received a revelation of *Taishang Laojun* 太上老君 (Highest Lord Lao). *Taishang Laojun,* the deified Laozi, revealed the "Doctrine of the Orthodox Unity [Resting on] the Authority of the Alliance" (*zhengyi mengwei zhi dao* 正一盟威之道) and so transmitted his divine teaching. Laozi also bestowed on Zhang Daoling the title of Heavenly Master (*tianshi* 天師).[54] Thus, he became the founding patriarch of the Orthodox

[51] *Sanguo zhi, j.* 8, p. 263 states that the Zhang Lu's sect "was by and large the same as the Yellow Turbans [i.e. Zhang Jiao's sect]." See also *Dian lüe*, quoted in the commentary to *Sanguo zhi, j.* 8, p. 264.

[52] There are, however, some elements in the *Xiang'er* commentary to the *Laozi*, which was used in the *Wudoumi dao*, that have parallels in the *Taiping jing.* Cf. Stephen Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist scriptures* (Taoist Classics; 1), Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1997, p. 70, note 42.

[53] *Dian lüe* (*Sanguo zhi, j.* 8, p. 264).

[54] *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jieke jing,* in *WWDZ,* vol. 18, p. 236b. For the hagiography

Unity sect. His successor was his son Zhang Heng 張衡, who in turn was succeeded by his son Zhang Lu 張魯. The later leaders of the sect all carry the title *tianshi* ("Heavenly Master") and according to the *Zhengyi* tradition are direct descendants of Zhang Daoling. The sect claims to represent Daoist orthodoxy from its very beginning. That it was orthodox cannot be disputed if we apply its own understanding of orthodoxy. After all, we should not expect a religious sect to declare itself as of heterodox origins. However, given the standards by which other sects were judged by contemporary officials and historians, we must say that the *Wudoumi dao* was not more orthodox then most of them.

Historical sources not belonging to the Daoist tradition give a slightly different picture of the early history of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect. The focus is not on Zhang Daoling but rather on his grandson Zhang Lu because the latter became a politically important figure during the last decades of the Han dynasty. The *History of the Later Han Dynasty* and the *Records of the Three Kingdoms* describe him not primarily as a religious teacher but as a political and military leader. In the last years of the reign of emperor Lingdi (r. 168–189) the military title *duyi sima* 督義司馬 ("Marshal who controls righteousness") was bestowed to him by Liu Yan 劉焉. Liu Yan was Regional Governor (*mu* 牧) in the Sichuan region and aspired to make his own rule independent of the collapsing Han dynasty. He ordered Zhang Lu and another commander, Zhang Xiu 張脩, who had the title *biebu sima* 別部司馬 ("Marshal of the other part"), to led troops to attack and kill the governor of Hanzhong 漢中. They sealed off the region and slew the emissaries of the Han court. Shortly afterwards Zhang Lu murdered his former ally Zhang Xiu and incorporated his followers into his own organization.[55] Thus, Zhang Lu rose to the position of a regional ruler involved in the power struggle in southwest China during the final years of the Han dynasty. Zhang Lu succeeded in establishing his own rule, which for thirty years was virtually independent. The Han government had no other choice than to recognize his position by appointing him governor (*taishou* 太守) of Hanning 漢寧 in 215. In the same year Cao Cao 曹操, who became the founder of the Wei 魏 Dynasty (220–265), forced

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of Zhang Daoling see also *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, *j.* 8, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961, pp. 55–58.

[55] *Sanguo zhi, j.* 31, pp. 866 f; *Hou Hanshu, j.* 75, p. 2432.

him to surrender and in return bestowed nobility on him and his five sons.[56]

This is quite an astonishing career for a sect leader. As with Zhang Jiao we must say that Zhang Lu's great achievement was his ability to organize his following and to turn it into a politically powerful organization. However, his rise to political power was based on his role as a religious leader. At least initially he attracted followers by his religious teachings and practices. According to the *History of the Later Han Dynasty* this religious tradition had been founded by his grandfather Zhang Ling 張陵, who during the reign of emperor Shundi (r. 126–144) had immigrated into Shu where he studied the *dao* in the Hemingshan 鶴鳴山 mountain. "He fabricated written talismans to delude the common people."[57] Those who entered his sect had to provide five pecks of rice. He was therefore commonly called "rice thief" (*mi zei* 米賊). His sect was continued by his son Zhang Heng and his grandson Zhang Lu.

This account is similar to the Daoist historiography mentioned above, except that it is clearly less sympathetic. The remark that Zhang Ling deluded the people and was called a rice thief shows that at that time his sect was disrespected by the authorities and hardly accepted as an orthodox teaching. Zhang Ling's sect does not seem to have much differed from the other sects of the time. It was only Zhang Lu who was able to build a well-organized movement. He established an administrative hierarchy. On the bottom were the newly recruited members, who were called "demon soldiers" (*guizu* 鬼卒); the local leaders were called "libationers" (*jijiu* 祭酒) and the heads of larger groups had the title "Head of Administration" (*litou* 理頭). Zhang Lu himself was called Lord Teacher (*shijun* 師君). The functionaries had not only administrative duties but acted as religious leaders as well. They supervised the ritual confessions of sins that were performed to heal or to prevent sickness and to secure a long life. The sect leaders thus exerted not only administrative but also spiritual control over their followers.[58] This control was so effective that Zhang Lu's organization became a political factor in the region. Accordingly Liu Yan tried to secure his support by appointing him marshal and in this way integrating Zhang Lu's following into his own forces.

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[56] *Sanguo zhi, j.* 8, pp. 263–265; *Hou Hanshu, j.* 75, pp. 2436 f.

[57] *Sanguo zhi, j.* 8, p. 263. The same report in *Hou Hanshu, j.* 75, p. 2435.

[58] *Hou Hanshu, j.* 75, p. 2435; *Sanguo zhi, j.* 8, p. 263.

However, Zhang Lu was not the only sect leader of the region who had built a strong organization. At the same time there was Zhang Xiu. In 184, the year of the Yellow Turbans uprising, this man had started a rebellion in Ba 巴 prefecture (south of Hanzhong). According to Liu Ai 劉艾, Zhang Xiu was a shaman (*wuren* 巫人) in Ba who practised healing. Since those cured by him contributed five pecks of rice he was called "Five Pecks of Rice Teacher" (*wudoumi shi* 五斗米師).[59] Liu Ai, who gives this information, was a contemporary of Zhang Xiu.[60] The account is therefore reliable. It is repeated in the *Dian lüe*, a work from the early third century.[61]

The *Dian lüe* gives a more detailed account of Zhang Xiu's activities: He was the leader of a sect called Five Pecks of Rice Sect (*Wudoumi dao*). His teachings and practices were similar to Zhang Jiao's Taiping sect, but included some elements not found there. In both cases illness was interpreted as a result of the sick person's sins. Curing, accordingly, required reflection on one's transgression and repentance. In the case of the Zhang Xiu's *Wudoumi dao* there were special rooms or huts where the sick retreated to contemplate on their sins. They also addressed gods with prayers for health and long life. This was done in a ritual in which the name of the culprit and his willingness to accept his guilt were written on three slips of paper. The first one was forwarded to heaven by deposing it on the top of mountains, the second one buried in the earth, and the third one immersed into waters. This ritual is the first occurrence of the later Daoist practice of sending written memorials to the divinities. Zhang Xiu's sect belonged to the tradition that was later called Daoism. The religious leaders, who were called "libationers" (*jijiu*), performed collective rituals where the book of *Laozi* was recited.[62]

The organization and the practices of Zhang Xiu's Five Pecks of Rice Sect were the same as of Zhang Lu's sect. They had similar political influence, for Zhang Xiu was likewise appointed marshal by

[59] Commentary to the *Hou Hanshu, j.* 8, p. 349.

[60] He was alive in 172 (*Hou Hanshu, j.* 9, p. 376).

[61] Cf. Xiong Deji, "Taiping jing de zuozhe", p. 24, notes 4 and 5. The author of the *Dian lüe* was Yu Huan 魚豢 (*Quan Sanguo wen* 全三國文, *j.* 43, 4b-5a, in *Quan shanggu sandai Qin Han Sanguo liu chao wen* 全上古三代秦漢三國六朝文, vol. 2, edited by Yan Kejun 嚴可均, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958, pp. 1296b-1297a). Yu Huan wrote his historical records during the reign of emperor Ming (227–239) of the Wei dynasty (*Shitong tongshi* 史通通釋, by Liu Zhiji 劉知幾, Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1978, *j.* 12, p. 347).

[62] *Dian lüe*, commentary to *Sanguo zhi, j.* 8, p. 264.

Liu Yan, and both sect leaders jointly led their troops against the governor of the Han court. Since Zhang Xiu had already "rebelled" some years earlier without having been punished, we can conclude that his position as a regional chief was rather strong. Zhang Lu then killed Zhang Xiu and integrated his followers into his own sect. He continued Zhang Xiu's religious and administrative practices, adding some new features. One was the establishment of Houses of Righteousness (*yishe* 義舍) on the roads, where travellers could rest and were offered meals. Another one was a system of punishment by labour. Those who had committed smaller offences had to repent and to build roads. So their guilt was removed. In more serious cases, however, ordinary punishments seem to have been applied.[63]

Zhang Lu's independent rule, which he established around 190 CE, was thus a blend of religious and political structures. His power resulted from his ability to enlarge the following of his original sect through the integration of other sects. That he was not overscrupulous in the methods to reach his aims is revealed by the fact that he murdered the rival sect leader Zhang Xiu. We may ask in which way the sects of Zhang Lu and Zhang Xiu were related to each other. According to the earliest sources, the *Dian lüe* and the remark of Liu Ai, which are both earlier than the *History of the Later Han Dynasty* and the *Record of the Three Kingdoms*, Zhang Xiu was the leader of the sect called *Wudoumi dao*. It was only after Zhang Lu had killed Zhang Xiu that he became the leader of this sect. This seems to contradict the *Record of the Three Kingdoms* and the *History of the Later Han Dynasty*, which in accordance with the Daoist historiography both report that Zhang Lu continued the tradition of Zhang Ling and Zhang Heng.[64] There are several possible explanations of this contradiction. One is, that both sects were called *Wudoumi dao* because they had the same practice of requiring five pecks of rice from their converts. They may have been part of a

[63] *Sanguo zhi*, *j.* 8, p. 263; *Dian lüe*, *ibid.*, p. 264.

[64] The commentator of the *Sanguo zhi* Pei Songzhi 裴松之 (first half of fifth century) tries to eliminate this contradiction by the assumption that the *Dian lüe* contains a mistake where it says that Zhang Xiu was the leader of the *Wudoumi dao*. Instead of Zhang Xiu it should be Zhang Heng, Zhang Lu's father. However the *Dian lüe* is corroborated by Liu Ai (cf. above note 59), they both report that it was Zhang Xiu who rebelled in 184. Besides, the *Hou Hanshu* (*j.* 75, p. 2432) and the *Sanguo zhi* (*j.* 8, p. 263) both mention that Zhang Lu killed Zhang Xiu and took over his following, which agrees with the *Dian lüe*. If Zhang Xiu were to be read as Zhang Heng, Zhang Lu would have killed his own father.

common tradition to which possibly still other groups belonged.[65] "Five Pecks of Rice Sect" was obviously a designation used by outsiders and not a self-designation. Another possible explanation is that there was just one *Wudoumi dao*, the leader of which was Zhang Xiu, and Zhang Lu's sect was called by this name only after the fusion of both sects. This would imply that Zhang Xiu's sect was considered more important, either because it was bigger or because Zhang Lu continued its religious tradition.

Though available evidence does support either of these two possibilities definitively, there are some points that support the second explanation. One is that neither Zhang Ling nor Zhang Heng are mentioned independently in the early sources but only in connection with Zhang Lu. If the sect had already been important before Zhang Lu one would expect some traces of it, although this is of course an *argumentum e silentio*. However, there is the other point that the sources do not pay much attention to Zhang Lu's father Zhang Heng. On the other hand, they give some information about his mother. She is depicted as a licentious beauty who had intimate relations with Liu Yan. It is also said that she relied on the Ways of the Demons (*guidao* 鬼道).[66] This shows her interest in popular religious practices; there is no mention, however, of her being married to Zhang Heng. If Zhang Heng had been a well-known sect leader and the religious practices of Zhang Lu's mother those of her husband, the sources probably would have alluded to him. Evidently, the religious tradition transmitted within Zhang Lu's family was not well-known before Zhang Lu reorganized the sect under the influence of Zhang Xiu's example. It may even be, as Xiong Deji suspects, that the tradition about Zhang Ling as the founder of the sect and its early history is a later invention to enhance Zhang Lu's prestige and to obscure Zhang Xiu's role.[67]

Whatever the role of Zhang Xiu was in the formation of the Five Pecks of Rice sect, it is clear that Zhang Lu adopted an organizational structure that existed before him. In an inscription dated on the year 173 the institution of libationers (*jijiu*) is already mentioned in connection

[65] According to the *Hou Hanshu* and the *Sanguo zhi* already Zhang Ling had the same practice. Cf. above p. 43 note 57.

[66] *Sanguo zhi, j.* 31, p. 866; *Hou Hanshu, j.* 75, p. 2432.

[67] Xiong Deji, "Taiping jing de zuozhe", pp. 22–24. Xiong argues that the compilers of the *Sanguo zhi* (late third century) and the *Hou Hanshu* (fifth century) already knew the Daoist hagiography about Zhang (Dao)ling and therefore included him into their records.

with Teachings of the Heavenly Masters (*tianshi daofa* 天師道法).[68] While nothing is known about libationers in the sect of Zhang Ling and Zhang Heng, it is certain that Zhang Xiu's sect knew this title. However, we cannot be sure that it was the only one. All we can conclude is that a sect called Teachings of the Heavenly Masters existed before Zhang Lu. Whether it was the sect of his father Zhang Heng or the one led by Zhang Xiu, or even a larger tradition from which both derived,[69] cannot be determined from the evidence available. We may assume, however, that by Zhang Lu's time the name *Tianshi dao* 天師道 ("Heavenly Master Sect") was the self-designation of the sect or sects commonly called Five Pecks of Rice Sect.

Common traits of popular sects during the Han dynasty

We need not and cannot decide the question of historical priority here. Suffice it to note that during the second century several sects with similar teachings and practices flourished in southwest China. They shared many features with the sects in the Northeast to which the Zhang Jiao's *Taiping dao* belonged. The boundaries between various sectarian groups were changing. Sometimes several sects fused to a larger one, sometimes they split into smaller ones, as it happened with the *Wudoumi dao* after Zhang Lu's death. This pattern of fusions and fissions was possible because the various sects were part of a common tradition, which we may call "proto-Daoist". It was not a unified sectarian organization but a dispersed tradition that comprised a large stock of related beliefs and practices. Depending on the circumstances, different elements of this tradition gained prominence, which accounts for the distinct features of the particular sects.

The similarities of the healing practices and the ritual confessions of sins have already been noted by the early historians. However, they do not tell us much about the sect teachings. These teachings were transmitted not only orally but also in writings. In the East, there were several books associated with the name *Taiping jing*,[70] In the West Zhang Xiu had the book of *Laozi in Five Thousand Characters*. The Heavenly

[68] *Li xu* 隸續, quoted in *Sanguozhi jijie* 三國志集解, by Lu Bi 盧弼, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982, *j.* 8, 414a (p. 265b of the modern edition).

[69] The title of a *Heavenly Master (tianshi)* can also be found in the *Taiping jing* (*Taiping jing hejiao*, p. 29). Thus, it may well have been common even among sects not belonging to the *Wudoumi dao* groups in west China.

[70] Much discussion about the "genuine" version of the *Taiping jing* could be

Master Sect (*tianshi daofa*) identified in 173 possessed a "profound scripture" (*wei jing* 微經) in twelve *juan*, the title of which is not known.[71] In addition, there are two scriptures not mentioned in the early sources but dating to the late Han dynasty: The *Laozi Xiang'er zhu* 老子想爾注 (*Xiang'er Commentary to Laozi*) and the *Laozi bianhua jing* 老子變化經 (*Scripture on the Transformations of Laozi*) have both been unearthed in Dunhuang.[72] Their exact origin is unclear but both seem to have been connected with the early Daoist groups in southwest China.[73] In the case of the *Xiang'er zhu* this can be concluded from its presenting itself as a commentary to the book *Laozi*, which we know was ritually recited in Zhang Xiu's sect. Ritual recitation of the writing in five thousand characters and confessions of sins are mentioned in the *Laozi bianhua jing*.[74] This text also forbids the use of alcohol, which according to the *Dian lüe* was among the rules introduced by Zhang Lu.[75]

Even if we cannot be sure that the texts we have today are exactly the same that existed at the end of the Han dynasty, we can use them to gain a general impression of the teachings propagated by these sects. For there is a number of common elements in these scriptures, which furthermore are in accordance with what we know of the sectarian practices. The sects shared a common outlook that stressed the need for a change of the present condition. A common trait is the importance given to the confessions of sins as a means to escape from the disastrous consequences caused by immoral behaviour. This was a teaching that distinguished the sects from other forms of popular religions and cults.

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avoided by accepting that there were several books using this name already during the Han dynasty.

[71] *Li xu*, cf. above note 68.

[72] The fragment of the *Laozi Xiang'er zhu* has been edited by Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, *Lao Zi Xiang'er zhu jiaozheng* 老子想爾注校證. Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 1991. It is discussed and translated in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist scriptures*, pp. 29–148. The fragment of the *Laozi bianhua jing* is reprinted and translated in Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao Tseu*.

[73] The *Xiang'er zhu* is traditionally attributed to Zhang Lu. According to Bokenkamp (*Early Daoist scriptures*, pp. 58–61) nothing speaks against this tradition. In any case the text belonged to the early Daoist movement.

[74] Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao Tseu*, p. 70.

[75] *Dian lüe*, in: *Sanguo zhi, j.* 8, p. 264. The use of alcohol is also forbidden in the *Taiping jing* (*Taiping jing hejiao*, p. 214). On the prohibition of alcohol, cf. Rolf A. Stein: "Remarques sur les mouvements du Taoïsme politico religieux au IIe siècle ap. J.-C", in: *T'oung Pao*, 50 (1963), pp. 1–78: 58.—Seidel (*La divinisation de Lao Tseu*, 74) thinks that the *Laozi bianhua jing* did not belong to the sect of the Heavenly Masters because Zhang Daoling and the name of the sect are not mentioned. She supposes that it belonged to another sectarian group of the same milieu.

Misfortune and illness and social decline were not attributed to the incalculable behaviour of demons or the unavoidable operation of the cosmic cycles. Rather it was human behaviour that was responsible for the fate of individuals and of the society. This teaching contained the idea of a rescue from the present state of suffering. Suffering here is not understood as a sophisticated and abstract notion as in Buddhist philosophy, but in a very concrete sense: It is the suffering of the people in a period of social turmoil and political instability, and the suffering of individuals through illness and misfortune.

Sometimes the social and political aspects were stressed, which demanded a change in the behaviour of the rulers. The *Taiping* sects in the East, which repeatedly submitted their scriptures to the emperors, are instances of this aspect of the tradition. In other cases individual redemption from suffering was more prominent, as with the elaborated healing and confession rituals of the sects of the Heavenly Masters. Both aspects were two sides of the same coin. They did not exclude but complement each other. Thus, in the *Taiping* sects there were healing rituals, and the Heavenly Master Sect had the ideal of *taiping*, the world without suffering.[76]

A further point of distinction was the idea of revelation. The teachings instructing men on the causes of suffering and misfortune and on the methods to achieve redemption had been revealed by divine teachers or messengers. These teachers transmitted a new knowledge to mankind, which provided redemption from the ills of the present world. Their revealed teachings usually occurred as divine scriptures, which became a characteristic of the various sectarian traditions. The importance given to the creation of a scriptural tradition of their own underlines that the Daoist sects of the Han dynasty were conscious of representing a new teaching. They could not rely on the canonical writings transmitted by the Confucians, even if the moral rules they advocated do not seem to contradict Confucian ethics. Their message, however, went beyond the Confucian teachings. They stressed the crucial function of individual moral behaviour and made the rulers responsible for the desperate state of the society. Redemption from the general decline could not be achieved through external rituals such as sacrifices to the gods, but

[76] *Laozi Xiang'er zhu jiaozheng,* pp. 38, 44. The ideal state is also depicted on p. 23. Cf. Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤, "«Xiang'er zhu» yu «Taiping jing» 《想爾注》與《太平經》," in *ibid.*, pp. 88–91 and Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist scriptures,* pp. 51–58.

only by changing one's life according to the rules of the *dao*.[77] Thus, following the newly revealed teachings was the only way to escape social and individual misfortune. Since this conception, which regarded the present state of the world as deficient, was not in full accord with the official interpretations of the Confucian scriptures, it had to be based on other authorities. The divinely revealed scriptures, which claimed to stem from the highest authorities imaginable, fulfilled this function.

The sects drew a sharp line between the followers of the *dao* and the people who belong to the world of evil. Only the true followers of the *dao*, who act according to the revealed teachings, will reach redemption from misfortune and death, while the people of the world are captured by the disastrous consequences of their own sins and the sins of their ancestors.[78] Thus, the sects offer deliverance to those who believe and follow their teaching amidst the masses of the evil and ignorant who do not observe the true way and therefore encounter disaster.[79] This offer of individual salvation is parallelled by the promise that the world could be saved as a whole if a virtuous ruler practised the *dao*. He would in this way transform the society and achieve the ideal state of Great Peace (*taiping*).[80] These teachings clearly mark a new development in the history of Chinese religions. Although most of the single elements had historical precedents, their combination led to a distinct type of popular religious movement that preserved these basic structures throughout the centuries. Hence, the popular sects of the Han dynasty are the earliest occurrence of a distinct sectarian tradition in Chinese history.

This sectarian tradition was not completely unrelated to the more orthodox forms of religious beliefs and practices. As we have seen, the sects clearly derived from the Huang-Lao tradition, which was also

[77] The *Laozi Xiang'er zhu* explicitly forbids sacrifices (p. 32 f.). The *Taiping jing* does not mention sacrifices as a means to achieve redemption. There are no records that any of the sects treated here practised offerings to the gods.

[78] In the *Taiping jing* the believers are called *zhongmin* 種民 (chosen people, lit. "seed people"). Not more than one out of ten belongs to them (p. 4). In the *Xiang'er zhu* they are called *daoren* (people of the *dao*), who will achieve immortality (p. 43), while the evildoers experience calamities (p. 37). The *Laozi bianhua jing* speaks of the *liang min* 良民 (good people) who will be elected by Laozi (Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao Tseu,* p. 70).

[79] In the *Laozi Xiang'er zhu*, p. 43 a future life after death is promised to the believers while the people of this world will be punished by the officers of the underworld and finally perish.

[80] *Laozi Xiang'er zhu*, p. 44; *Taiping jing hejiao,* p. 726 *et passim.*

cherished among the political elites. Laozi was a prominent deity among sectarians but also at the imperial court. The sects were not confined to the lower classes of the society. To be sure, most of their adherents probably were peasants and ordinary commune dwellers, but since they used scriptures at least their leadership cannot have been uneducated. The social status of Gan Zhongke, Gong Chong, and Xiang Kai was high enough to gain access to the court, and Zhang Xiu and Zhang Lu maintained close relations with the local official Liu Yan. The sects were "popular" in the sense that they did not base their teachings on the authority of the literary traditions of the elite culture. They relied on the authority of new revelations to propagate their beliefs. A recurrent theme were millenarian expectations, which were widespread in popular and elite milieus alike. As we have seen, the Confucians had largely eliminated the millenarian elements from their tradition during the Later Han dynasty. The new Confucian orthodoxy mistrusted religious movements that hoped for a fundamental change of the present conditions. These hopes always threatened the political stability, and the many rebellions connected with sects justified the concern of the political elites.

We must add, therefore, a further characteristic of the Daoist sects of the Han dynasty, which they shared with later sectarian traditions. They were considered heterodox by the contemporary political elites. Confucian officials denounced them for not following the orthodox teachings of the canonical scriptures and deluding the people through their false doctrines. Gan Zhongke, Gong Chong, and Xiang Kai were criticised on exactly these grounds. They, like Zhang Jiao, were never included in the pedigree of the later Daoist orthodoxy. The same is true for Zhang Xiu, whose leadership of the *Wudoumi dao* was almost eliminated from historical consciousness. The *Dian lüe* calls him a charlatan who could not really heal but fooled the ignorant people.[81] Since he had rebelled against the imperial government, he was ill-fitted as a prominent figure when the tradition of Heavenly Masters constructed its history. However, even Zhang Ling and Zhang Lu are depicted as leaders of heterodox sects in the early sources. Zhang Ling "deceived the people with his fabricated books" and was called a "rice thief". Zhang Lu even attacked the regional governor and killed the imperial envoy. His teachings were denounced as "Way of the Demons" (*guidao*

[81] *Dian lüe*, in: *Sanguo zhi*, *j.* 8, p. 264.

鬼道).[82] By the standards of the time the Five Pecks of Rice Sect was not less heterodox than any other of the many contemporary sects.

That Zhang Lu succeeded in building his own independent dominion without being subdued by the government forces was due to the weakness of the Han court, which had lost control over the region. His state was one of the many independent rules engaged in the power struggle of the time. It was strong enough to survive until Cao Cao seized power, and Zhang Lu was wise enough to surrender when the time had come. His sect did not survive as a unified organization. Several ten thousand households of his followers in Hanzhong were deported to the North to Chang'an 長安 and Sanfu 三輔.[83] This measure furthered the spread of the sect beyond its area of origin. In the following centuries several sects associated with the tradition of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect appeared in south China, while in the North Kou Qianzhi 寇謙之 (363–448) assumed the title of Heavenly Master and gained support from the emperor of the Northern Wei. This marks a significant step in the transformation of the heterodox *Wudoumi dao* to an orthodox form of Daoism.

3. The Formation of Daoist Orthodoxies

If we use the term "Daoist" in connection with the religious movements of the Han dynasty, we apply a classification that is meaningful only against the background of later developments. During the Han dynasty there was no common designation for the various religious movements. Since Daoism as a clearly defined and organized religion did not exist, there was no distinction between "orthodox" and "heterodox" *Daoism.* The sects were heterodox religions in the sense that they were criticized by the ruling elites. However, these sects were one root from which the Daoist religion grew in the following centuries. The development of Daoism from diffused Daoist traditions to a distinct religion is marked by the conjunction of two factors: First, various related but independent early Daoist traditions were systematized, which allowed to present Daoism as a coherent system of teachings and practices comparable to Buddhism. This was achieved mainly through the proliferation of new scriptures and the definition of a set of canonical writings. A corollary

[82] *Sanguo zhi, j.* 8, p. 263.

[83] *Sanguo zhi, j.* 15, p. 472.

of this process was the exclusion of certain elements that did not conform to the newly defined identity of Daoism. Second, these new systems of teachings and practices, which were then identified as "Daoist", were successfully propagated among the elites including the imperial courts. They were recognized as orthodox teachings not contradicting the fundamental norms and values of the literati. Again, this implied the exclusion of more popular elements belonging to the early Daoist traditions that did not comply with the new standards of Daoist orthodoxy.

That Daoism had become a state-sponsored orthodox religion is evident when in 471 emperor Mingdi 明帝 of the (Liu-) Song 宋 dynasty (420–479) called Lu Xiujing 陸脩靜 (406–477) to his capital Jiankang 建康 to collect and catalogue the scattered Daoist scriptures then existent. His catalogue *Sandong jingshu mulu* 三洞經書目錄 (*Catalogue of the Scriptures of the Three Caverns*) laid the foundation to the later Daoist canon.[84] Lu Xiujing's and a few decades later Tao Hongjing's 陶弘景 (456–536) careers as literati and men of ample reputation illustrate the success of the Daoists in integrating and transforming the diffused Daoist traditions to a systematized religion that could compete with Buddhism for imperial favour.[85] Buddhism, which had gained access to the ruling elites in the South as well as in the North in the third century, provided the example for an organized religion with canonical writings, elaborate rituals, clerical institutions, and recognized scholarship. Although Buddhism was occasionally criticised by Confucian scholars, it enjoyed the patronage of the ruling elites and of many emperors. For practical and political purposes it was considered an orthodox form of religion. If Daoism was to reach a comparable position and to compete successfully with Buddhism, it had to be reformulated in a way that was attractive to the educated and political elites. The Shangqing 上清 and Lingbao 靈寶 traditions, which took shape during the fourth and fifth centuries,[86] fulfilled these requirements much more

[84] Cf. Chen Guofu 陳國符, *Daozang yuanliu kao* 道藏源流考, Taibei: Gu Ting Shushi, 1975, p. 106 f.

[85] For the influence of Buddhism on the Lingbao scriptures see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist scriptures*, pp. 371–376.

[86] For the Shangqing tradition see Michel Strickmann, "The Mao Shan revelations: Taoism and the aristocracy," *T'oung Pao*, 63, no. 1 (1977), pp. 1–64; idem, *Le Taoïsme du Mao Chan. Chronique d'une révélation* (Mémoires de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises; 18), Paris, 1981; Isabelle Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du Taoïsme*, vols. 1–2 (Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient; 137), Paris, 1984.

than the Five Pecks of Rice Sect and other more popular forms of the evolving Daoist tradition.

Thus, the formation of Daoism as an orthodox and well-defined religion was stimulated by the example of Buddhism. Before the arrival of Buddhism the indigenous religious traditions of China were not conceived as a unified religion but existed as independent cults and sects. The term *dao*, which was often used as part of their name—such as *Wudoumi dao, Taiping dao, Gan jun dao* 干君道, *Li shi dao* 李氏道, and others—did not refer to the metaphysical concept *Dao*, but was a generic term signifying "way" in the sense of "method", "religious teaching" or simply "sect".[87] Naturally, these sects shared many common elements; it was, however, only after Buddhism as a foreign religion had appeared that the need was felt to create a comprehensive religious system out of these elements that could be opposed to Buddhism. The opposition between the Buddhists and the more traditionally minded Chinese literati[88] advanced the formation of Daoism as an indigenous answer to Buddhism. At the same time it prompted the Daoists to keep their distance from those forms of the native tradition that did not have the approval of the political authorities.

Although the Daoist Huang-Lao tradition had enjoyed the recognition of emperors during the Han dynasty, its status as an orthodox religion was by no means secured. Cao Pi 曹丕, son of Cao Cao and as Wendi 文帝 (r. 220–226) emperor of the Wei 魏 dynasty (220–265), in 221, soon after ascending the throne, issued an edict criticizing the Han emperor Huandi because he had installed sacrifices to Laozi.[89] Wendi attributed the failure of former dynasties to their deviation from the ritual practices of the ancient rulers. These had offered sacrifices only to their own ancestors and the deities of the natural forces. He decreed, therefore, that all offerings not included in the official list of sacrifices and the activities of the popular mediums and priests (*wu zhu*

[87] Cf. Chen Guofu, *Daozang yuanliu kao*, p. 259.

[88] Cf. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer and Thomas Jansen, "Religionsdebatten und Machtkonflikte. Veränderungen in den Machtverhältnissen im chinesischen Mittelalter," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft*, 1, no. 2 (1993), pp. 50–90.

[89] *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, quoted in Ren Jiyu, ed.: *Zhongguo Daojiao shi*, p. 46. The reliability of the source could be doubted, because the Buddhists may have had an interest in reporting imperial criticism of the cult of Laozi. It should be noted however, that the source does not mention Buddhism as preferable to the cult of Laozi but rather the worship of Confucius. Since the establishment of a cult for Confucius by Wendi is confirmed by other sources (*Sanguo zhi, j.* 2, p. 75 f) the report of the *Xu gaaseng zhuan* seems reliable.

巫祝) should be regarded as heterodox religious teachings (*zuodao* 左道).[90] Similar edicts had already been promulgated by Cao Cao and were again issued in 266 by the first emperor of the Western Jin Dynasty (265–316).[91] The imperial decrees do not explicitly mention Daoism, but they criticise the cult of Laozi and try to restrain the activities of *fangshi*.[92] We have to bear in mind that at that time Daoism as a clearly identifiable religion did not yet exist. Although the teachings and practices of the early Daoist sects certainly differed in many respects from the popular cults of the mediums and shamans, they had some traits in common. From the outside view of critical officials the popular sects and cults looked all alike. It was therefore crucial for the evolving Daoist religion to draw a sharp line between itself and the heterodox popular cults if it aspired to official recognition.

The transformation of Daoism from a variety of ancient traditions and popular religious movements to a recognized and clearly defined orthodox religion required the exclusion of elements disdained by the political and intellectual elites. The Five Pecks of Rice Sect was in many regards close to the popular cults of the shamans. Zhang Xiu was called a "weird wizard" (*yao wu* 妖巫),[93] a usual designation for popular mediums and priests. And after the organization of Zhang Lu had dissolved, many of the other sects that derived from it were regarded as heterodox religious movements.[94] The Heavenly Master Sect was not primarily a tradition of the elites. It was rooted in the tradition of popular healing cults, and after Zhang Lu's organization had dissolved, many of the sects deriving from it remained in this tradition. On the other hand, Zhang Lu and his sons had risen to wealth and high status under Cao Cao; parts of the leadership of his sect, which were equally transferred to the North, certainly belonged to the upper levels of the society. In this way the tradition was dispersed in different social milieus. Naturally, the groups that were active among the lower classes were more open to influences from the conventional religious forms prevalent there, while the adherents that were nearer to the political and intellectual

[90] *Sanguo zhi, j.* 2, p. 84.

[91] *Jinshu, j.* 3, p. 53.

[92] Cf. Tang Changru 唐長儒, "Wei Jin qijian beifang Tianshi dao de chuanbo 魏晉期間北方天師道的傳播," in *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi lun shiyi* 魏晉南北朝史論拾遺, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983, pp. 218–232: 218–220.

[93] *Hou Hanshu, j.* 8, p. 349.

[94] The relations of the *Tianshi Dao* with the popular cults has been treated by Chen Guofu (*Daozang yuanliu kao*, pp. 260 f).

elites adopted the cultural patterns of their social environment. Since the elites were opposed to the popular cults and sects, a certain tension within the tradition of the Heavenly Master Sect developed. When after the fall of the Western Jin dynasty (316) large parts of the northern elites emigrated to the South, they brought their religious traditions with them. In the South they contributed to the formation of the Shangqing and Lingbao traditions, which represented the new Daoist orthodoxy. However, the more popular forms of the Heavenly Master tradition did not cede to exist. They remained in the milieu of the common religion and healing cults.

We shall turn to some of them below. Presently, we have to note that there were other streams contributing to the evolving Daoist tradition that were equally critical of the popular sects. A good example is Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343 ?), one of the most famous proponents of the alchemical tradition of the *fangshi*. In his *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (*The Master Who Embraces Simplicity*) Ge Hong remarks:

> What is commonly called *dao* (i.e. the teachings of popular sects)[95] is usually occult deception. They propagate falsehood and deceit, and the longer they continue the farther they spread. They cannot [really] practise the art of healing, since they are not able to abandon their wrong beliefs. They do not master healing through herbs and minerals. Instead they only practise the nonsense of addressing gods and sacrificing, relying on prayers and oracles.[96]

The text goes on describing the mediums and priests of these popular sects as charlatans who delude the people and exhaust its wealth through expensive sacrifices. And Ge Hong fully approves the measures of emperor Wudi 武帝 (i.e. Cao Cao) and other rulers, who had forbidden licentious religious practices of this kind. Ge Hong adopts the attitude of the ruling elites towards the popular cults and puts his own teachings in sharp contrast to them. To which degree his own views agree with the official condemnation of heterodox cults and sects by the authorities is evident when he even demands that the laws against them should be enforced by the death penalty to eradicate them.[97]

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[95] Ge Hong here refers to the semantic ambiguity of the word *dao*. At the beginning of *juan* 9 he develops the notion of *Dao* as a metaphysical concept, which he now opposes to what is commonly called *dao*, i.e. popular sects.

[96] *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi* 抱朴子內篇校釋, by Ge Hong 葛洪, edited by Wang Ming 王明, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985, *j.* 9, p. 172.

[97] *Baopuzi neipian jiao shi, j.* 9, p. 172.

Ge Hong does not mention Zhang Lu and the *Wudoumi dao*, but he does refer to Zhang Jiao,[98] whose healing practices were hardly different. This shows that the religious milieu to which Ge Hong belonged kept apart from the healing cults that were at the beginning of the Heavenly Master Sect. However, the remnants of this sect, even if they had broken into many independent groups, were deeply rooted in society. After the fall of the Western Jin dynasty (316) they spread to southeast China. There they influenced the formation of the new Shangqing movement, although it is difficult to assess how strong this influence actually was.[99] Anyway, when during the fifth century the Daoist scriptures were catalogued and classified, the scriptures of the Heavenly Masters were excluded from the collection of the *Three Caverns* (*san dong* 三洞).[100] Similarly, Tao Hongjing assigned an inferior position to the rituals of the Heavenly Masters.[101]

The pattern of orthodoxy formation through the "purification" of the tradition according to the standards of the elites can also be observed in the reforms of the Heavenly Masters tradition by Kou Qianzhi during the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534). Between 425 and his death in 448 Kou Qianzhi assumed the title of Heavenly Master (*tianshi*), which had allegedly been conferred upon him by *Taishang Laojun* (the deified Laozi) in a revelation. The deity had entrusted him with the task of reforming the religion. Kou Qianzhi succeeded in gaining the support of the Wei emperor, and for some decades his new form of Daoism became the court religion of the dynasty.[102] In the preceding centuries the Heavenly Master Sect had spread in north China following

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[98] *Ibid.*, p. 173.

[99] Michel Strickmann ("On the alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," in *Facets of Taoism. Essays in Chinese religion*, edited by Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 123–192: 165–168) argues that the Shangqing movement should be regarded as a direct offspring of the Heavenly Master Sect, while Isabelle Robinet (*La révélation du Shangqing*, vol. 1, p. 72 f) does not support this view.

[100] Cf. Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing*, vol. 1, pp. 82–84; Ninji Ofuchi, "The formation of the Taoist canon," in *Facets of Taoism. Essays in Chinese religion*, edited by Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 253–268: 265.

[101] *Deng zhen yin jue* 登真隱訣, *j.* 3 (DZTY 420), in *WWDZ*, vol. 6, p. 618c; see also Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing*, vol. 1, p. 71.

[102] For details see Richard B. Mather, "K'ou Ch'ien-chih and the Taoist theocracy at the Northern Wei court, 425–451," in *Facets of Taoism. Essays in Chinese religion*, edited by Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 103–122.

the move of large parts of Zhang Lu's followers after his surrender to Cao Cao. Though the sect did not continue as a unified organization, its tradition was still alive among the populace. The elites, however, looked with suspicion at the practices of these popular sectarian groups. Moreover, the memory of sectarian movements involved in revolts had been newly fuelled some decades earlier: In 399 Sun En 孫恩 had started a rebellion in the South that lasted for three years. Whatever the political motives of Sun En might have been, his affiliation to local sectarian groups connected to the Heavenly Masters tradition was beyond doubt.[103]

Kou Qianzhi's reforms of the tradition of the Heavenly Masters consisted in the elimination of those elements of the tradition that contradicted the officially approved norms and values. In his revelation Laozi sharply criticised some of the inherited practices of the sect, including the collection of rice levy and the rites of union of the sexes. He ordered Kou Qianzhi "to cleanse and correct the Daoist teaching (*daojiao* 道教) and to abolish the false methods of the three Zhangs."[104] The practice of contributing rice to the sect leader calls to mind the Five Pecks of Rice Sect. We may assume, therefore, that the blame was directed against sects of the Heavenly Master tradition and that the "false methods of the three Zhangs" refer to Zhang Ling, Heng, and Lu.[105] Similar practices of collecting tax-like contributions may have been common in other sects aspiring to build organizations independent of the official administration. It was precisely this kind of organized sect beyond the control of the government that arose the suspicion of the political elites. The attempt to create organizations and power structures independent of the legitimate imperial rule was enough to regard these sects as heterodox. Kou Qianzhi thus attempted to eliminate these practices and to domesticate the popular sects. In this way the Daoist tradition should be adapted to the demands of the ruling elites. The same applies to the abolition of the sexual rites, which offended the official morality.

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[103] For Sun En see below p. 78.

[104] *Weishu, j. 114*, p. 3041.

[105] Against this conclusion speaks the fact that Zhang (Dao)ling was respected as the founder of the tradition by Kou Qianzhi. The expression "three Zhangs" could also refer to Zhang Jiao and his two brothers who had, however, nothing to do with the collection of rice.

There were still other elements in the popular religious traditions disposed of being judged as heterodox. Most important in this regard were millenarian expectations, which had often been the ideological base of rebellions. Millenarian and messianic ideas prevailed in many circles during the fifth century.[106] The tradition of the Heavenly Masters was no exception. As the *History of the (Northern) Wei Dynasty* remarks, the followers of Zhang Ling believed in the succession of three *kalpas*, just as the Buddhists. At the end of a *kalpa* the earth would be completely destroyed.[107] Such eschatological beliefs appear also in the revelations that Kou Qianzhi received in 423: The end of the present *kalpa* is imminent, and the present time is one of decay when it is difficult to practise the true teaching. The pious people are therefore instructed to build altars and to worship regularly to gain merit. These people will be able to learn the art of longevity and thus be the "seed people" (*zhongmin* 種民) of the True Lord (*zhenjun* 真君).[108] The "seed people" are the elected ones who follow the newly revealed teachings and thus will escape the impending catastrophe of the end of the *kalpa*. Though Buddhist influence is evident, the notion of "seed people" can already be found in the *Taiping jing* where the context is similar.[109]

The influence of the *Taiping* traditions on Kou Qianzhi's brand of the Heavenly Masters movement is obvious. In the same revelation of 423 it was prophesied that he would become the counsellor of the True Lord of Great Peace in the North (*beifang taiping zhenjun* 北方泰平真君).[110] The True Lord of Great Peace and the True Lord to which the "seed people" adhere without doubt refer to the same idea of a messianic figure who will rule the coming age of Great Peace. Thus, Kou Qianzhi picked up the threads of the messianic traditions that reached back to the Han dynasty.[111] However, he neutralized the potential threat to the existing government in a brilliant way. Instead of

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[106] For messianic hopes and the expectation of the end of the present time in the southern Daoist tradition see Michel Strickmann, "On the alchemy of T'ao Hung-ching," pp. 153–155, 185–188. Buddhist messianism is treated below (pp. 123 ff).

[107] *Weishu, j.* 114, p. 3048.

[108] *Weishu, j.* 114, pp. 3051 f.

[109] See above note 78. Because of the complicated text history of the *Taiping jing* we cannot be completely sure whether the notion of *zhongmin* was already used in its early versions.

[110] *Weishu, j.* 114, p. 3051.

[111] A Great Lord of Taiping (*da taiping jun* 大太平君) surnamed Li 李 who will elect the seed people is mentioned in the *Taiping jing hejiao* (p. 4).

contrasting the ideal rule of the True Lord of Great Peace with the decline of the present age, he declared that the rule of Great Peace would be established by the present emperor of the Northern Wei dynasty. In 440 emperor Taiwudi 太武帝 changed the name of the reign-period to *Taiping zhenjun* (True Lord of Great Peace, 440–451). Two years later (442), Kou Qianzhi declared that for the first time in history the emperor was now ruling with the help of the True Lord and proposed that he should receive the Daoist talismans (*fushu* 符書) to make manifest his sage virtue. Accordingly, a solemn rite of investiture was held where the emperor was enthroned in a Daoist ceremony.[112] A potentially revolutionary messianic tradition was thus transformed into an ideology legitimizing the present dynasty.

It does not seem that Kou Qianzhi's new Heavenly Masters tradition continued as a distinct movement long after his death. Nor is there any evidence that his teachings were adopted by the common people. His reformed *Tianshi dao* was designed to suit the particular needs of the ruling dynasty. In this sense it was really an orthodox form of Daoism, where the Heavenly Master as spiritual leader had the position of an imperial minister. Kou Qianzhi's efforts to convert the Daoist tradition into an orthodox religion can be described as an attempt to cleanse it from heterodox elements and simultaneously subject it to the norms of the ruling elite. That his enterprise was much promoted by Cui Hao 崔浩 (381–450), who was a scholar in the Confucian tradition, illustrates that there was no antagonism between the Confucian and the new Daoist forms of orthodoxy. They shared the same fundamental values of the elites and jointly opposed the indecent practices of the popular cults and the social disorder that they ascribed to them.[113] They had a common interest in establishing the lost order of the world, which could be called a Confucian attitude, but at the same time they both were interested in supernatural affairs, which one may

[112] *Weishu, j.* 114, p. 3053. According to Ware's translation the emperor was declared to be the True Lord (J. R. Ware, "The Wei-shu and the Sui-shu on Taoism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 53 (1933), pp. 215–250: 237). The text says however, that he ruled "with the help of" (*yi* 以) the True Lord. This is also more consistent with the context.

[113] Before in 446 the general persecution of Buddhism started on Cui Hao's instigation (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, by Sima Guang 司馬光, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976, *j.* 1214, p. 3923), there was a decree in 444 that not only forbade the activities of private monks but was primarily directed against the popular "teachers and mediums" (*shi wu* 師巫) who were said to delude the illiterate people with their heterodox practices (*Weishu, j.* 4 B, p. 97).

call a Daoist inclination. The distinction between "Confucianist" and "Daoist" in this case obviously is not exclusive. It rather reflects the field of specialization within the frame of the literate culture of the elites.[114] Kou Qianzhi's new Daoism was orthodox because it fitted in this frame, while other forms of the Daoist tradition did not and were therefore regarded as heterodox. The same adoption to the cultural and political norms of the elites developed in the *Shangqing* and *Lingbao* traditions of the South, represented by men such as Lu Xiujing and Tao Hongjing. The tradition of the Heavenly Masters in the South was redefined in the fifth century to win the support of the emperor.[115] The formation of Daoist orthodoxy can therefore be summarized as the elaboration of the Daoist traditions within the frame of the elite culture. The reverse of this process was the exclusion of those elements of the tradition that were not acceptable within this framework. Thus, other strands of the Daoist movement, which had little or no contact with the evolving orthodoxy, were left back as heterodox sects.[116] Accordingly, the canonization of a corpus of orthodox Daoist scriptures implied the exclusion of many others that did not comply with the standards of orthodoxy.[117] The rewards for this purification of the tradition and the arrangement with the ruling classes were official recognition, material endowments, and access to those in power and wealth.

The further history of the orthodox forms of Daoism is beyond the scope of this book. It should be noted, however, that the boundaries between Daoist orthodoxy and popular religions with an odium of heterodoxy were never clear-cut in practice.[118] Practices considered

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[114] Kou Qianzhi told Cui Hao that he had received the order of the gods to study also the Confucian teaching (*rujiao* 儒教) to be able to assist the True Lord of Great Peace. But he did not feel qualified enough and asked for the aid of his friend (*Weishu, j.* 35, p. 814).

[115] Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist scriptures*, p. 187.

[116] Such heterodox sects are criticized in the *Santian neijie jing*, in *WWDZ*, vol. 28, p. 415a. For a discussion cf. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist scriptures*, pp. 196 f.

[117] Demands to purify the religion of deviant scriptures are already made in the *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jieke jing, Da dao jia lingjie* 大道家令戒 (DZTY 732), in *WWDZ*, vol. 18, p. 237a (cf. translation in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist scriptures*, p. 176). Although the text, which originated in the third century, belongs to the Heavenly Masters tradition, it is an attempt to cleanse the tradition from some elements not acceptable to those leaders who had held offices under the Wei dynasty (Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist scriptures*, p. 156).

[118] For documentation see Rolf A. Stein, "Religious Taoism and popular religion

heterodox were deeply rooted in the religious life, not only among the peasants and lower classes but even among the elites. Even the imperial courts were no exceptions. Thus, emperor Mingdi 明帝 (r. 227–239) of the Wei dynasty, whose father had issued severe prohibitions of popular religious practices,[119] had a residence built for a peasant woman who pretended to embody a heavenly god and healed people with charm water. The emperor himself was treated by her, but since he was not cured had her executed.[120] The distinction between orthodox and heterodox practices was a normative classification and not a distinction between clearly separated cultural milieus.

4. Popular Sects after the Han Dynasty

Not all popular sects were heterodox in the sense of being repressed by the ruling elites. They were, however, not orthodox either, because their beliefs and practices were not legitimated by the scriptural authorities of the elite culture. They were part of the popular culture. Since participation in the popular culture was not confined to specific social milieus, the social composition of individual sects varied considerably. Popular religious movements were no lower-class phenomenon although, of course, many of them recruited their members mainly from the underprivileged and illiterate. The evolving Daoist movement, however, enjoyed the support of many who belonged to the powerful and educated. Its transformation from a popular to an orthodox religion reflects its increasing influence in the social milieus of the elites.

The two historically most influential sects of the Later Han dynasty, Zhang Jiao's *Taiping dao* and Zhang Lu's *Wudoumi dao*, had gained their large following through the integration of other sects with similar teachings and practices. This was possible since the differences between various sects were not substantial. Indeed, Zhang Lu's and Zhang

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from the second to the seventh centuries," in *Facets of Taoism. Essays in Chinese religion*, edited by Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1979, pp. 53–82; Kristofer M. Schipper, "Taoist ritual and local cults of the T'ang dynasty," in *Proceedings of the first international conference on sinology, Academia Sinica*, Tapei, 1981, pp. 101–115.

[119] See above p. 54. Mingdi continued the policy of his father who had patronaged Confucian learning. In 230 he had the laws promulgated by his father engraved in stone and displayed in front of the temple of the imperial ancestors (*Weishu, j.* 3, p. 97).

[120] *Sanguo zhi, j.* 3, p. 114.

Jiao's sects had so many traits in common that the question about their mutual relationship has always puzzled historians. As an answer to this puzzle I have suggested that both movements were parts of a widespread religious tradition, which manifested itself in various popular sects. The historical fate of these sects, the number of their followers, and their endurance as religious organizations depended primarily on the charismatic and organizing qualities of their leadership.

Zhang Jiao's sect was destroyed after the failure of the Yellow Turbans Rebellion, and the organization of Zhang Lu's sect dissolved after its leadership had been removed to the northern plain. However, just as the two sects had not emerged out of nothing they did not vanish without any remains. They had been formed through the coalescence of independent sects and they again dissolved into independent sects. This process is well documented in the case of the *Wudoumi dao*. In the *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jieke jing* 正一法文天師教戒科經 (*Scripture on the Laws of the Orthodox Unity, the Rules of the Heavenly Masters Teachings*) some developments of the Heavenly Master Sect after Zhang Lu are castigated. The scripture blames the *jijiu* (libationers), the local leaders, for having abandoned the true *dao* of Zhang Daoling and turning it into heterodox teachings.[121] It further remarks that local leaders all have established their own sects.[122] The text refers to the early third century, but the situation described seems to have remained the same at least until the times of Kou Qianzhi and Lu Xiujing.[123]

Popular sects in the region of Sichuan

Some of the sects that split off from Zhang Lu's organization are known from historical records. In the Sichuan region, where the tradition was firmly rooted, in 277 a sect leader named Chen Rui 陳瑞 and some of his followers were executed by the Regional Inspector and the meeting houses of the sect burnt. At the same time all local cults not in

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[121] *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jieke jing, Da dao jia lingjie*, in *WWDZ*, vol. 18, pp. 236c-237b.

[122] *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jieke jing, Yangping zhi* 陽平治, in *WWDZ*, vol. 18, p. 238c.

[123] Cf. Masayoshi Kobayashi, "The celestial masters under the Eastern Jin and Liu Song dynasties," *Taoist Resources* 3, no. 2 (1992), pp. 17–45: 20 f. According to Tang Yongtong's 湯用彤 research, the text was written by Kou Qianzhi (DZTY, p. 568).

accordance with the orthodox rituals were forbidden and the places destroyed.

While the local cults were connected with the popular shamans, Chen Rui's sect clearly stood in the tradition of the Heavenly Masters.[124] Not only were the leaders called *jijiu* (libationers), but Chen Rui himself had adopted the title *tianshi* (Heavenly Master). As in the case of Five Pecks of Rice Sect it was said that he misled the people through his "Way of the Demons" (*guidao*). Among the adherents of the sect were higher officials and even the governor of the Ba 巴 commandery Tang Ding 唐定, which shows that it had found access to the local and regional gentry. It must have had a considerable following and the number of "more than a thousand" probably refers only to the members of the gentry not including the peasants.[125] The gentry members were all striped of their status after Chen Rui's execution.

Although the similarities to the *Wudoumi dao* are conspicuous, this variety of the Heavenly Master Sect had some traits not found in Zhang Lu's sect. They used wine and fish, apparently as offerings.[126] It is also noted that they paid particular attention to ritual purity. Any contact with dead and delivery had to be avoided. Persons who had been ritually defiled were not admitted to the assemblies for one hundred days. It is not clear if this sect was a group that split from Zhang Lu's sect or if it just derived from the same sectarian milieu. There may have been several sects using the title of Heavenly Master and having a similar organization. There is no indication that Chen Rui derived his spiritual authority from Zhang Ling or his successors.[127]

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[124] As it has been remarked above, the officials made no difference between the popular cults of the shamans and the Daoist sects. They were all considered heterodox.

[125] *Huayangguo zhi jiaobu tuzhu* 華陽國志校補圖注, by Chang Qu 常璩, edited by Ren Naiqiang 任乃強, Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1987, *j.* 8, pp. 439 f. This is Ren Naiqiang's interpretation (*ibid.*, 442). According to the *Guang Hong ming ji* 廣弘明集 (T 2103), in *Taishō*, vol. 52, p. 171b) Chen Rui's following amounted to several thousand.

[126] The text does not specify the context clearly. It continues that "they did not worship other deities." It is not clear, however, to whom the wine and the fish were offered (*Huayangguo zhi jiaobu tuzhu*, *j.* 8, p. 439).

[127] The terms *jijiu* and *tianshi* are strong indications for a relation between Chen Rui's sect and the *Wudoumi dao*. However, the title *jijiu* (libationer) was common not only in sectarian milieus. It originally referred to a worthy elder who offers wine to the spirits on the occasion of ritual banquets. It then became an official title (*Shiji*, *j.* 74, p, 2348, with commentary by Suo Yin 索隱 on p. 2349). The title is therefore no characteristic of the Heavenly Master Sect. Similarly, the expression *tianshi* (Heavenly Master) was common and also used in other religious groups (cf. above note 69).

However, some twenty years later a case is reported where the connection with Zhang Lu's sectarian tradition cannot be doubted. In 300 a rebellion started under the leadership of Li Te 李特.[128] The forces of the rebels consisted mainly of non-Han people who were very numerous in that region. Li Te himself belonged to one of these tribes. The insurgence finally led to the establishment of an independent rule, which lasted for almost half a century until 347. From the *Record of Huayang* we learn that the Cong 賨 people,[129] to which Li Te belonged, traditionally cherished the cult of demons (*gui*) and the practices of the shamans (*wu*). At the end of the Han dynasty they had become followers of Zhang Lu's "Way of the Demons" (*guidao*).[130] The Five Pecks of Rice Sect had since then been transmitted among the non-Han population. It is understandable that the affinity of the sect to the demon worship of the local population increased the suspicion of Han officials and let them regard it as a heterodox religious cult. On the other hand, there were Han families who had been sect members for generations, among them even high officials of the region.

The Five Pecks of Rice Sect or the sects that stemmed from it had thus become a factor of cultural integration. It was a cultural integration, however, that worked only on the regional scale. From the point of view of the central government, however, its effects were quite opposite since the sects could become the core of regional cohesion, enhancing latent centrifugal tendencies. Forces threatening the integrity of the state were heterodox by definition, for the political and cultural unity of the Chinese world was one of the basic dogmas of all orthodoxy. To be sure, this unity was continuously challenged by the historical realities, but nevertheless it remained the only legitimate order of things. Any force that undermined this order was illegitimate or, what is the same, heterodox.

The events connected with Li Te's insurrection illustrate that the official mistrust towards heterodox religions was no wild notion. After his forces had entered the region of Shu 蜀 he was well received by the

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According to the *Sanguo zhi* (*j.* 8, p. 263) Zhang Lu was not addressed *tianshi* but *shijun* (Lord Teacher).

[128] *Jinshu, j.* 120, pp. 3021 ff.

[129] *Cong* (tribute paying people) here is probably a generic term for the non-Han population of the southwest. It could also be the name of a particular tribe.

[130] *Huayangguo zhi jiaobu tuzhu, j.* 9, p. 483. That the Five Pecks of Rice Sect had many followers among the non-Han population is also confirmed by the *Sanguo zhi, j.* 8, p. 263.

Regional Inspector Zhao Xin 趙廞, who was aspiring to establish his own independent rule. The two combined their forces just as had Liu Yan and Zhang Lu a century before. One reason for their understanding was certainly their common opposition to the central government of the Jin dynasty. However, they also shared their religious belief. For Zhao Xin's ancestors had been followers of Zhang Lu's Five Pecks of Rice Sect.[131] Hence, both families belonged to the sectarian milieu of the region for generations. It was a milieu that obviously fostered a sense of regional autonomy, thus continuing Zhang Lu's ambition to build an independent state.

The political ambitions of Zhao Xin and Li Te were stronger than their religious ties. Their coalition did not last for long and they soon became enemies. After Li Te's death his son Li Xiong 李雄 succeeded him in 303. It was he who two years later made himself King of Chengdu (*Chengdu wang* 成都王) and founded the state Dacheng 大成. In the year 306 he accepted the title of emperor and ruled until his death in 334. The dynasty came to its end in 347 when it was invaded by the forces of the Eastern Jin.[132]

Li Xiong's chief adviser was Fan Changsheng 范長生 who belonged to one of the great families in the region. He was famous for his knowledge of astronomy and venerated by the local people "like a god."[133] Li Xiong accepted him as his teacher and conferred the title "Great Master of Heaven and Earth" (*tian di tai shi* 天地太師) upon him. Fan Changsheng used to live in the grottoes of the Western Mountains where he pursued the *dao*. After Li Xiong had founded his state Fan Changsheng came to Chengdu where he was appointed chancellor and honoured as "sage Fan" (*Fan sheng* 范聖). Fan Changsheng was also called "Teacher of the Nation" (*guoshi* 國師). He was a religious leader with considerable prestige and political influence due in part to the position of his family, which had a large following in the region. After his death in 318 his son Fan Ben 范賁 succeeded him as chancellor. When in 347, after the state had been invaded by the Jin

[131] *Huayangguo zhi jiaobu tuzhu, j.* 8, p. 447.

[132] For details see Ren Jiyu, ed., 任繼愈, *Zhongguo daojiao shi* 中國道教史, Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1990, pp. 52–56; Terry F. Kleeman, *Great Perfection* 大成 *: Religion and ethnicity in a Chinese millennial kingdom*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998.

[133] *Shiliu guo chunqiu chao* 十六國春秋鈔, quoted in the commentary to the *Huayangguo zhi jiaobu tuzhu*, p. 489.

forces, a new revolt started, the rebels established Fan Ben as emperor. He had a following of ten thousand people.[134]

The *History of the Jin Dynasty* remarks in this context that Fan Changsheng had gained his following through deceiving the people with heterodox teachings (*zuodao*). One cannot expect another verdict on a religion that had challenged the authority of the central government. It is clear, however, that the religious tradition on which Fan Changsheng relied was the Heavenly Master Sect.[135] The sectarian tradition of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect was firmly established in the region, not only among the peasants and lower classes but also in the upper level of the society. Fan Changsheng belonged to the influential and powerful families of the region where the religion had been transmitted since several generation. The families of other high officials, including Zhao Xin, likewise supported this tradition. Furthermore, the sect members included Han Chinese as well as non-Han people. Thus, the tradition of the Heavenly Masters had become the common creed of a large part of the population in the southwestern region.

What exactly the teachings and practices of this sectarian tradition were during the Western Jin and in the fourth century, we cannot say. As has been observed in the case of Chen Rui, the various sects had developed their own forms and did not simply continue Zhang Lu's Five Pecks of Rice Sect. One should expect that the religious customs of the non-Han people found their way into the local sects. The ritual avoidance of death and birth may have had their origin there.[136] On the other hand, the Heavenly Master tradition with its close connection between spiritual and temporal authority seems to have been a central element. This is evident not only from the fact that Chen Rui accepted

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[134] *Jinshu, j.* 58, p. 1583; *Zizhi tongjian, j.* 97, p. 3077.

[135] For details cf. Tang Changru 唐長孺, "Fan Changcheng yu Badi ju Shu de guanxi 范長生與巴氐據蜀的關係," *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 4 (1954), pp. 115–121; Seidel, "The image of the perfect ruler in early Taoism," pp. 233–236.

[136] It should also not be completely neglected that the sole name consistently used for this sectarian tradition is *guidao* ("Way of the Demons"). Zhang Lu's sect was called *guidao* (cf. above p. 46), just like Chen Rui's. *Gui* (demons) certainly played a role in the belief system of these sects. The ordinary members of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect were called "demon soldiers" (*gui zu* 鬼卒) and *gui* were also the agents who inflicted illness on those who had transgressed the rules (*Hou Hanshu, j.* 75, pp. 2435 f). The great attention given to demons is not fully in accord with later "orthodox" Daoist teachings and recalls the popular cults of both the Han and the non-Han population. In the later tradition of the Heavenly Master Sect the banning of demons remained an important religious practice.

the title of Heavenly Master but also from the position Fan Changsheng had during the short-lived Cheng dynasty. The emperor revered him as "Great Master of Heaven and Earth" (*tian di tai shi*), which is reminiscent of the title *tianshi* ("Heavenly Master" or "Master of Heaven"). Li Xiong clearly wanted his rule to be legitimated and protected through the spiritual authority represented by Fan. The old Daoist motive of the enlightened ruler who moulds his government on the advice of a sage counsellor shines through this constellation.[137]

The sources say nothing about the relation between the various groups belonging to this tradition. We may surmise that they did not form a coherent organization. Religious teachers such as Fan Changsheng and Chen Rui before him seem to have been charismatic leaders who attracted a following of their own. There is no indication that they depended directly on each other. However, they belonged to the same religious milieu and succeeded in gaining followers because the ground was well prepared by long existing religious traditions and the aftermath of Zhang Lu's sect. From the perspective of the central government, the religion was heterodox since it was a focus of regional identity and illegitimate authority. What for the Jin government was heterodox, however, for the Cheng dynasty became the orthodox religion. Fan Changsheng was honoured as Teacher of the Nation by emperor Li Xiong and his teachings became *de facto* the state religion.

Sects in the Southeast (Jiangnan)

While in the southwestern region of Sichuan the Five Pecks of Rice Sect had been the rallying point of the sectarian traditions at the end of the Han, in the East it was Zhang Jiao's Great Peace Sect (*Taiping dao*) that had a similar function. The remnants of the latter, however, are more difficult to discover since the failure of the Yellow Turbans Rebellion led to an almost complete destruction of the sect organization. What remained were some shattered groups of Yellow Turban rebels[138] and—more important—the religious traditions that had been the seedbed on which Zhang Jiao's sect had grown. This tradition was deeply rooted and continued during the following centuries even if it is only occasionally recorded in the sources. Unlike the Five Pecks of Rice

[137] This has been observed by Anna Seidel ("The image of the perfect ruler in early Taoism," p. 234).

[138] Cf. *Hou Hanshu, j.* 171, pp. 2310 f; *Sanguo zhi, j.* 1, p. 9 f.

Sect—which later was ennobled, so to speak, and regarded as the beginning of orthodox Daoism—Zhang Jiao's Great Peace Sect and its offsprings usually did only earn the scorn of Daoist writers.

One exception is the sect led by Yu Ji 于吉 at the end of the second century. The *Yunji qiqian* 雲芨七籤, quoting the *Dongxian zhuan* 洞仙傳, has a short biography of this man, who was a native of Langye in Shandong. His family had transmitted for generations the arts of the *dao* and himself he had received more than a hundred scrolls of divine scriptures. They were called the *Taiping qing lu shu* 太平青籙書 (*Scripture on the Great Peace with Green Registers*). When Sun Ce 孫策, one of the many warlords during the last years of the Han dynasty, invaded the southeastern part of China, Yu Ji followed him. He was much respected by Sun Ce's troops and officers. They "venerated him like a god." Sun Ce first accepted Yu Ji as his retainer because he healed many of his men with his skills. Later, however, Sun Ce became jealous of Yu Ji's popularity and influence and finally killed him. His corpse disappeared and after that Sun Ce was often frightened by the apparition of Yu Ji, which drove him to madness. The text concludes with the remark that the Sect of Lord Yu (*Yujun dao* 于君道) continued to exist among the populace.[139]

The name Yu Ji 于吉 is very similar to Gan Ji 干吉 who according to the *History of the Later Han Dynasty* was the teacher of Gong Chong and had transmitted the *Taiping qing ling shu* to him.[140] Some historians consider Yu Ji and Gan Ji as the same person.[141] However, the Gan Ji (or Yu Ji) who was Gong Chong's teacher must have been active at the beginning of the second century, while the story of Yu Ji refers to the last years of that century. Therefore it is not very probable that Yu Ji and Gan Ji were the same person. Apparently the Yu Ji referred to in the *Dongxian zhuan* had adopted the prestigious name of his famous forerunner and pretended to be this immortal.[142] Similar cases are well

[139] *Yunji qiqian* 雲芨七籤, by Zhang Junfang 張君房, Beijing: Qi Lu shushe, 1988, *j.* 111, p. 607c.

[140] See above pp. 33 ff.

[141] Bei Songzhi 裴松之 (372–451) quotes in his commentary to the account of Yu Ji in the *Sanguo zhi* from the *Jiangbiao zhuan* 江表傳 (*Sanguo zhi*, *j.* 46, p. 1110). The same passage is quoted by Li Xian 李賢 (Tang dynasty) in his commentary to the *Hou Hanshu* with reference to Gan Ji. Instead of Yu Ji, Li Xian's text has Gan Ji (*Hou Hanshu*, *j.* 30 B, p. 1084).

[142] Gan Ji (or Yu Ji) appears also in Daoist sources in connection with the *Taiping dao*. The *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jieke jing*, *Da dao jia lingjie* (in *WWDZ*, vol. 18, p. 236a)

attested in history. Whatever the relation between Yu Ji and Gan Ji may be, the fact remains that in early third century a religious teacher was active in the Zhejiang region who identified himself with the sectarian tradition transmitting the *Taiping jing*. He had many followers and his sect continued after his death.

From the *Jiangbiao zhuan* 江表傳 (*Record of Jiangbiao*), which is quoted as a commentary to the *Records of the Three Kingdoms*, we learn some more details about the practices of Yu Ji. He established Houses of Purity (*jingshe* 精舍) where incense was burnt and sacred texts (*daoshu* 道書) recited. In his healing practice he used talismans and charm water (*fushui* 符水).[143] Healing with charm water was a practice used by Zhang Jiao and probably in the Five Pecks of Rice Sect, although it does not seem to be attested for the time of Zhang Lu. The Houses of Purity recall the Houses of Righteousness (*yishe*) which Zhang Lu had established. Since Zhang Lu and Yu Ji were contemporaries living in different parts of China, it is not very probable that one of them borrowed this institution from the other. We should rather presume that such houses for religious meetings and rituals were a common institution in some religious milieus.[144] It is remarkable, however, that in Yu Ji's sect the recitation of sacred scriptures went together with the burning of incense. Since incense-burning as a religious practice was introduced into China by the Buddhists from India, we can see that as early as the second century some popular sects had received Buddhist influences. This applies particularly to the sectarian tradition connected with the *Taiping jing*. As has been noted above, already Xiang Kai had some knowledge of Buddhism and certain elements in the *Taiping jing* may have been influenced by Buddhist teachings.[145] During the Han

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dates him to the end of the Zhou dynasty. Cf. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist scriptures*, p. 168, for more details.

[143] *Jiangbiao zhuan*, quoted as commentary to the *Sanguo zhi*, *j.* 46, p. 1110. See also commentary to the *Hou Hanshu*, *j.* 30 B, 1084 where the same source is quoted writing, however, Gan Ji instead of Yu Ji.

[144] The term *jingshe* was used during the Han dynasty to designate retreats where Confucian scriptures were taught (cf. *Hou Hanshu*, *j.* 79 B, p. 2570). It was also used in Buddhist contexts, at least since the Jin dynasty (Ding Fubao, ed. 丁福保, *Foxue da cidian* 佛學大辭典, Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1984, p. 1258a).

[145] Cf. Paul Demiéville, "Philosophy and religion from Han to Sui," in *The Ch'in and Han empires, 221 B.C. - A.D. 220*, edited by Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (The Cambridge History of China; 1), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 808–872: 817. Demiéville also remarks, that many beliefs and practices of the early Daoist sects show the influence of Buddhism. The confession of sins, the exhortation

dynasty the centres of Buddhist activity were in the North and above all along the eastern coast from Shandong to Zhejiang,[146] which is exactly the region where the *Taiping jing* tradition was transmitted.

We do not know anything about the later fate of the *Yujun dao* (Sect of Lord Yu), but the tradition of the *Taiping jing* certainly continued. One of the later sects related to it was connected with the name of Bo He 帛和. Lord Bo (Bo *jun* 帛君) was said to have received the *Taiping jing* from Lord Gan (Gan *jun* 干君), which obviously is another reading of Lord Yu (Yu *jun* 于君). Bo and Gan (or Yu) were both natives of Langye,[147] which had been Gong Chong's native region. According to the *Shenxian zhuan* (*Biographies of Immortals*), Bo He lived during the time of Sun Quan 孫勸, the first emperor of the Wu 吳 dynasty (r. 222–236).[148] This would make him a younger contemporary of the Yu Ji (or Gan Ji) who was killed by Sun Quan's brother Sun Ce. Hence, Bo He could well have been one of Yu Ji's disciples. Like (the original) Gan Ji, the teacher of Gong Chong, Bo He was famous enough to provoke later sect leaders to use his name. Ge Hong narrates several cases of such impostors. In one case the disciples of the real Bo He were excited when they heard that their master had reappeared and went to visit him. When they saw him, the fraud was unveiled.[149] Because the name was used by several persons it is not possible to say definitely who was the founder of the tradition that in later Daoist texts is called the Sect of the Bo Adepts (*Bojia zhi dao* 帛家之道). Presumably it was the one treated in the *Shenxian zhuan*.

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to good deeds or the undertaking of works for the public good were all actions that Buddhism recommended in the category of gifts (*dāna*). He states, however, that there is no evidence in the sources that could prove any borrowing from Buddhism (p. 818 f). This statement can probably not be maintained in view of Yu Ji's incense-burning. The influence of Buddhism on the *Taiping jing* of the Han dynasty is discussed by Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbei chao Fojiao shi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1955, vol. 1, pp. 104–120.

[146] Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China*, Leiden: Brill, 1959, vol. 1, pp. 40 f.

[147] *Laojun shuo yibai bashi jie* 老君説一百八十戒, quoted in *Yunji qiqian*, *j.* 39, p. 215c. Also according to the *Taishang Laojun jing lü* 太上老君經律 (DZTY 780), in *WWDZ*, vol. 18, p. 218b, Lord Bo received the *Taiping jing* from Lord Gan who had received it from Laozi.

[148] The *Shenxian zhuan* says that Bo He was a disciple of Dong Feng 董奉 (*Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳, in *Daozang jinghua lu* 道藏精華錄, vol. 2, edited by Shouyizi 收一子, Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 1989., *j.* 7, p. 28b). According to same source (*j.* 6, p. 26a) Dong Feng lived during the time of the first ruler of the Wu dynasty, i.e. Sun Quan.

[149] *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi*, *j.* 20, pp. 350 f. The source writes the name Bo He 白和.

Among the scriptures mentioned in connection with this Bo He are the *Sanhuang tianwen dazi* 三皇天文大字 (*Large Characters of the Celestial Script of the Three August Ones*) and the *Wu yue zhen xingtu* 五岳真形圖 (*True Illustrations of the Five Peeks*), both of which were transmitted to Ge Hong by his teacher Zheng Yin 鄭隱.[150] Thus, Ge Hong's form of Daoism seems to be related to Bo He. In later Daoist writings, however, the tradition is criticised for its aberrations from Daoist orthodoxy. As late as the early sixth century, Tao Hongjing relates that the Sect of the Adepts of Bo was connected with female mediums (*da shiwu* 大師巫) and the cult of popular deities. Such popular cults were outside the realm of orthodox Daoism since they practised blood sacrifices. Even men like Xu Mai 許邁, however, who belonged to the circle where the orthodox Shangqing movement had its origin, were close to this tradition.[151] This illustrates how intimately the evolving Daoist orthodoxy was related to beliefs and practices regarded as heterodox and how difficult a task it was to purge the tradition of these elements.[152]

A characteristic of the popular cults castigated by Ge Hong were animal sacrifices offered to demons and gods. In this point, Ge Hong explains, the Sect of the Li Adepts (*Lijia dao* 李家道 or *Lishi zhi dao* 李氏之道 "Sect of the Li family") was different, for they did not kill victims. This sect originated in the third century in the Sichuan region where a hermit named Li A 李阿 lived for generations. Because of his presumed high age he was called Sir Eight Hundred Years (*babaisui gong* 八百歲公). Later, towards the beginning of the fourth century, a man named Li Kuan 李寬, who spoke Sichuan dialect, came to the Southeast where he was venerated for his healing skills. His followers belonged to all classes, from the nobility down to the common people. They amounted to nearly one thousand. Li Kuan was believed to be no other than Li A and he was therefore likewise called Li Eight Hundred (Li Babai 李八百). After his death his sect was continued by his pupils and, as Ge Hong concludes, "they expanded and filled the region south of the Yangtze."[153]

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[150] *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi, j.* 19, p. 336.

[151] Cf. Stein, "Religious Taoism and popular religion," p. 54 f.

[152] For the tradition of the Bo sect cf. Chen Guofu, *Daozang yuanliu kao*, pp. 276 f; Ren Jiyu, ed., *Zhongguo daojiao shi*, pp. 60–62.

[153] *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi, j.* 9, *pp.* 173 f. For other legendary accounts of Li Babai and Li A see *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, by Li Fang 李昉, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961 (1981), *j.* 7, vol. 1, pp. 49 f.

The practices reported of Li Kuan are very similar to what we know of the Daoist sects during the Han. In his healing he made use of charm water, amulets (*sanbu fu* 三部符), body stretching (*daoyin* 導引) and breathing exercises. Attaining long life and immortality was a central aim of these practices, even if Ge Hong rejoices to narrate how Li Kuan's health deteriorated and he finally died of a plague because he did not apply the right recipes. What exactly the relations between Li Kuan in the Southeast and Li A in the Southwest were is difficult to assess. Anyway, Li A must have been famous enough to be known in far away regions. In Sichuan Li A may have been connected with the Heavenly Master Sect, which later regarded him as an immortal "who ascended to heaven in bright daylight."[154] Li Kuan apparently exploited this fame to establish his own sect in the southeastern region. He became a very influential sect leader with followers from among the highest ranks of society. So strong was his position that he could protect people who wanted to escape the forced labour service by accepting them as his disciples. People wishing to see him became so numerous that he ceased to receive them all. He was a religious leader who had gained considerable prominence and was respected by the regional gentry.

The Li sect attracted people mainly through its healing successes. It was more organized and developed, however, than the many healing cults existing all over the country. The sect members had common rituals in which collective feasts seem to have had a central place.[155] They also had rituals of fasting and abstention (*zhaijie* 齋戒) that were performed in case of sickness.[156] Thus, the Li sect, which in the fourth century spread throughout southeast China, had elaborate rituals that were in many ways reminiscent to the Five Pecks of Rice sect. Since its vast following came from all layers of the society, it was presumably one of the major sects of its time.

Ge Hong does not mention Zhang Lu or the Heavenly Master Sect, which means that Li Kuan probably did not refer to this tradition to enhance his reputation. Instead, he identified his sect with the tradition

[154] *Yunji qiqian, j.* 28, p. 166a; see also p. 165 for Li Babai.

[155] *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi, j.* 9, p. 173. Ge Hong chastises these common meals for being sumptuous. Collective meals on various ritual occasions were also a common practice in the Heavenly Master Sect. However, there were restrictions as to the number of guests received. The rules changed during the times. Cf. Chen Guofu, *Daozang yuanliu kao,* p. 325 f.

[156] *Baopuzi neipian jiaoshi, j.* 9, p. 174.

of Li A. If Li Kuan's sect really derived from Zhang Lu's Heavenly Master Sect, as the similarities suggest, we must conclude that the latter had not much reputation in the Southeast. Li Kuan might have been one of the minor leaders of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect who founded their own sect and did not feel further committed to Zhang Lu and his tradition. It may be, however, that the similarities between the sects were not due to a direct historical descent but to the fact that many of the ritual practices, of the organizational structure, and of the beliefs were in no way unique to Zhang Lu's sect.

Even during the late Han dynasty there were many different sects with similar features and we may expect that there was a great deal of mutual borrowing in the course of time. However, one should be cautious in the interpretation of the sources. Not every occurrence of healing through charm water and talismans or through confession of sins, not every building for ritual usage, and not even every title of libationer (*jijiu*) can be regarded as a clear evidence of the Five Pecks of Rice tradition. There certainly was much mutual influencing of the various sects, and the influence of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect had been particularly strong because it once had so many followers. However, it is clear that men like Li Kuan, though they were presumably somehow related to it, did not identify themselves with the Heavenly Master Sect.

In the early fourth century, at the same time when Li Kuan was active in the Southeast, there was another sect leader surnamed Li who had immigrated from the northern plain to Jianye 建鄴 (modern Nanjing). This Li Tuo 李脫 also pretended to be eight hundred years old and was accordingly called Li Babai ("Li Eight Hundred"). Even if there is no evidence of a direct historical link between the various "Li Eight Hundreds"—Li A in Sichuan, Li Kuan, and Li Tuo in the East—a sectarian tradition connected with the surname Li must have had some reputation at the beginning of the fourth century, one century after the end of Zhang Lu's Daoist state. None of these sectarian leaders seems to have claimed to belong to Zhang Lu's Five Pecks of Rice Sect. However, the similarities in their practices show that they were part of a common tradition of popular sectarianism. Li Tuo's sect was called *guidao* ("Demon sect"), as was Zhang Lu's. Like the latter, he practised healing. He also produced scriptures.[157] His sect was well organized with a leadership that bore official titles. Because

[157] *Jinshu*, *j.* 6, p. 160.

he had many followers, Li Tuo and his sect became a political factor involved in the struggles of the time. He evidently had political ambitions of his own, because one of his disciples was declared to be the prophesied king Li Hong 李弘. We do not have many details about the circumstances, but finally Li Tuo, Li Hong, and the official Zhou Zha 周札 were accused of conspiracy and executed in 324.[158]

The common reference to the figure of Li Eight Hundred and the other similarities allow the conclusion that a sectarian tradition connected with the surname Li was known in different parts of China towards the end of the third century. It may have originated in the Sichuan region from where it spread to the northern plain and from there to the Southeast, probably with the emigration of northerners after the fall of the Western Jin dynasty (316). The same happened to the remnants of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect, with which the Li sects shared many traits. We can only speculate about possible connections between the two sectarian traditions. Since there is no reference to Zhang Ling or Zhang Lu in the Li sects, it seems improbable that they saw themselves as a continuation of the Heavenly Master Sect. This does not mean that there was no relation at all between the two sectarian traditions. They probably derived from the same sectarian milieu, which time and again brought forth leaders capable to integrate smaller groups and thus to form larger organizations. Judging from what we know of the sects during the Ming and Qing dynasty we may suppose that the boundaries between the various traditions were unstable. Their identity depended much on the charismatic and organizational qualities of particular leaders.

This is not to say that all sects were alike, there certainly were certain traditions with distinctive marks. The Five Pecks of Rice Sect with its reverence for Zhang Ling and the scriptures revealed to him is a good case, also the Li sects with their obvious link to the Li family. They may have cherished different scriptures and stressed different beliefs, but behind the differences was the common base of popular traditions that had influenced each other for centuries. It is only from the perspective of later history that we call some sects flourishing from the second to the fourth centuries "Daoist", because they were included in the genealogy of the Daoist church history.

Even if the Li sects may not belong to the pedigree of orthodox Daoism, they mark a significant step in the development of heterodox

[158] For Li Tuo see *Jinshu, j.* 58, p. 1575; *j.* 61, p. 1662.

popular sects to orthodox Daoism. At least the well-known leaders Li Kuan and Li Tuo managed to reach a position that allowed them to gain access to the political elite. Like Zhang Lu before them they transformed sectarian leadership into social prestige, material wealth, and even political influence. These developments were the first steps that moved some of the many popular sects up the social ladder, even if this rise suffered many setbacks. To the degree that the religious traditions represented by the popular sects won followers among the ruling and educated elites they became submitted to the influence of the cultural values of these very elites. In this way some sectarian traditions, which were particularly successful in this regard, were finally transformed from heterodox sects into orthodox Daoism. But this happened, as has been observed, only in the fifth century.

It is above all the Five Pecks of Rice Sect that represents the paradigm of this development. Yet it does not seem that in the early fourth century its later success was foreshadowed. There was a number of sects with similar features that did not trace their origins to the Heavenly Master Zhang Ling. On the other hand, there is no doubt that some sects in the fourth century did derive form the tradition of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect and were aware of it. One case in question is the sect of Du Zigong 杜子恭, who in the second half of the fourth century became one of the most influential Daoist teachers in southeast China.[159]

Du Zigong from Qiantang 錢唐 (present-day Hangzhou) stands at the beginning of a long family tradition that for generations adhered to the Five Pecks of Rice Sect.[160] He was said to have received a revelation of Zhang Zhennan 張鎮南, who demanded that he transmit his Daoist teachings, taught him his secret methods and appointed him head of the Yangping district.[161] This account shows Du Zigong's effort to set up his position as a religious leader by claiming supernatural appointment. He apparently had no other credentials as for instance inherited religious authority within the Five Pecks of Rice Sect. Similar

[159] The problem of the identity of Du Zigong is discussed in Ren Jiyu, ed., *Zhongguo daojiao shi*, pp. 118 f. See also Qing Xitai 卿希泰, ed., *Zhongguo daojiao shi* 中國道教史, Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1988–1995, vol. 1, pp. 268 f; Kobayashi, "The celestial masters under the Eastern Jin and Liu Song dynasties," pp. 19 f.

[160] *Nan Qishu* 南齊書, by Xiao Zixian 蕭子顯, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972 (1983),*j.* 54, p. 942.

[161] Yangping zhi 陽平治 was one of the thirty-six districts of Zhang Lu's organization.

cases of establishing one's own religious authority as a sect leader in competition with rival sect leaders can be found time and again in the history of Chinese sectarianism. We may suspect, therefore, that Du Zigong was trying to establish himself as the leader of one of the scattered groups that had evolved out of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect.

Be that as it may, in any case Du Zigong succeeded in attracting within a decade a large following of several ten thousand households that contributed rice to him. He practised healing through charm water and was particularly renowned for his ability to discover the fate of families over several generations.[162] Thus, his religious expertise and leadership secured him a respected position and material wealth. People from far and near came to be converted to his sect. He clearly attempted to resume the tradition of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect and to reorganize one of its branches. The great importance of healing rituals and divination still shows a close affinity to the more popular variants of the Daoist tradition. What sets Du Zigong apart from most other religious leaders deriving from the same current was his success in gaining the support of the aristocracy. Many members of the rich and influential families in the southeastern region were attracted and revered him as their teacher.[163] Thus, the sectarian tradition founded by Du Zigong and transmitted within his family for many generations marks an important step in the transformation of the ill-regarded Five Pecks of Rice Sect into a respected religion of the higher and educated classes. It is one of the junctures connecting the tradition of the Heavenly Masters with the evolving Shangqing movement.

One of Du Zigong's disciples was Sun Tai 孫泰, who belonged to the lower aristocracy and entertained good relations with the most powerful families of the Eastern Jin dynasty. After Du Zigong's death, which was during the last years of emperor Xiaowudi's 孝武帝 reign (r. 373–396), Sun Tai established himself as a successful sect leader. He gained many followers from the common people "who revered him like a god" and contributed their fortunes to him in order to receive his blessings.[164] Sun Tai's sect had adherents not only among

[162] *Yunji qiqian*, *j.* 111, 609a/b quoting the *Dongxian zhuan*. Du Zigong's name is here given as Du Bing 杜昺. For the identity of cf. Ren Jiyu, ed., *Zhongguo daojiao shi*, pp. 118 f.

[163] *Songshu* 宋書, by Shen Yue 沈約, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974 (1993), *j.* 100, p. 2445.

[164] *Jinshu*, *j.* 100, p. 2632.

the lower classes but also many followers from the highest aristocracy who all venerated him for his occult and secret arts. Among them was Sima Yuanxian 司馬元顯, son of the mighty Sima Daozi 司馬道子 and close relative of the emperor. As an influential sect leader associated with the power elite of his time, Sun Tai soon became involved into the political struggles during the last decades of the Eastern Jin dynasty. In 398 Wang Gong 王恭, Huan Xuan 桓玄, and other regional commanders made preparations to seize the power of the ruling dynasty and attacked the forces of Sima Yuanxian. In response, Sun Tai collected several thousand troops "to suppress [Wang] Gong on behalf of the dynasty." By that time he and his sect had developed into an independent factor in the political and military power struggle of the ailing dynasty. Small wonder, therefore, that he tried to pursue his own political ambitions and prepared for a military campaign to secure his share of the falling empire. His plans, however, were disclosed to Sima Daozi, who had him executed.[165]

The following events turned into one of the major rebellions in Chinese history.[166] Sun Tai's nephew, Sun En 孫恩, took over the forces of his uncle and in 399 attacked the southern coast from the seaside to take revenge for Sun Tai's death. The ensuing fighting involved the whole area and resulted in a tremendous loss of life on both sides. Hundreds of thousands were killed, died of starvation, or were forced to commit suicide. Sun En drowned himself in 402, but the rebellion continued until 410 under the leadership of his brother-in-law Lu Xun 盧循. Like the rebellion of the Yellow Turbans at the end of the Han, Sun En's rebellion foreshadowed the fate of the collapsing dynasty. In 420 Liu Yu 劉裕, one of the many warlords of the time, emerged as the most skilled and powerful and established the (Liu-) Song 宋 dynasty (420–479).

Sun En's rebellion affected not only the course of the political events but also had a bearing on the development of the Daoist religion. His family had been attached for generations to the Five Pecks of Rice sect. He inherited from his paternal uncle Sun Tai the powerful position of a religious leader who could command thousands of followers. Hence,

[165] *Jinshu*, *j*. 100, p. 2632.

[166] For Sun En's rebellion cf. Werner Eichhorn, "Description of the rebellion of Sun En and earlier Taoist rebellions," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung*, 2 (1954), pp. 325–352; Qing Xitai 卿希泰, *Zhongguo Daojiao sixiang shigang* 中國道教思想史綱, Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1980–85, vol. 1, pp. 269–277; Ren Jiyu, ed., *Zhongguo Daojiao shi*, pp. 118–122.

Sun En's rebellion may be regarded as a religious uprising. However, it does not seem that Sun Tai's and Sun En's motives to take arms were founded on their religious beliefs as in the case of Zhang Jiao's rebellion. There is no evidence of millenarian or messianic propaganda. Whatever role religious teachings may have played in Sun En's campaign—more dedicated followers at least believed he became an immortal after his death—the overall impression is that the rebellion was above all an attempt to partake in the power struggle and to establish an independent rule or a new dynasty. We do not need discuss the political and economic factors behind the upheaval. Some scholars have interpreted it as a revolt of the suppressed population against the ruling class,[167] while others see in it a conflict between the rich landowners and the Jin government,[168] which seems to be more in accord with the historical evidence. On both sides members of the upper classes were involved and on both sides were people connected with Daoism. This alone should caution against overstressing the religious dimension of Sun En's rebellion.

One can assume that the religious practices and beliefs of Sun En's sect resembled by and large those that have been mentioned in connection with Sun Tai and Du Zigong. Healing rituals and occult practices to secure material welfare seem to have been their main attraction. Even if this branch of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect is remarkable for its many followers from among the ruling elites, it does not seem to have contributed much to the religious and intellectual development of Daoism. It was closer to the many popular sects regarded as heterodox than to the evolving forms of elite Daoism centring around written traditions and the quest for individual salvation.

The importance of Sun En's sectarian movement for the history of Chinese religions lies in the political and social sphere. For it showed once again into how powerful a threat to the political stability the latent sectarian traditions could be transformed. This manifestation of heterodox sectarianism left much deeper traces in the historical consciousness than the many smaller sects and cults that were never involved in any political activities. Like the Yellow Turbans two centuries before, Sun En's rebellion contributed significantly to the formation of a historical view that saw in popular religious movements above all a danger to the political and social order. At the same time this historical experi-

[167] Cf. Qing Xitai, *Zhongguo daojiao sixiang shi gang*, vol. 1, p. 271.

[168] Cf. Eichhorn. "Description of the rebellion of Sun En," p. 338.

ence increased the pressure on the Daoist circles to keep a distance from popular religious movements of this kind and to reorganize the Daoist tradition according to the orthodox norms and values approved by the elites. Kou Qianzhi's attempt to reform the tradition of the Heavenly Masters and to cleanse it from the "false teachings of the three Zhangs" must be seen against this background, as well as the formation of the Shangqing and Lingbao movements, which addressed primarily the educated elites. The sect of Sun Tai and Sun En may be regarded as the last major case where the tradition of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect was still marked with the stigma of heterodoxy. On a smaller scale, however, these popular forms of the tradition, which were reproved by men like Kou Qianzhi and Lu Xiujing,[169] continued even after the formation of Daoist orthodoxies.

5. Eschatology and Millenarianism

The rebellion of Sun En left no traces of millenarian or messianic beliefs. This is remarkable since we know that during the last decades of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420) and later in the fifth century the expectation of a new age was widespread in Daoist milieus. These beliefs in the end of the present time and the coming of a new era when all suffering and injustice would be suspended are usually treated under the label of "messianism". Nothing speaks against this terminology if we understand it as a conventional term. It has been observed, however, that the coming of a new age is not necessarily connected with the appearance of a "messiah" in the strict sense of the word, and the term "messianism" therefore is not always adequate.[170] To avoid this problem, I prefer "eschatology" as a more general term to designate beliefs about the end of the present condition and the beginning of a new form of existence. A special case of eschatological beliefs is "millenarianism", by which I refer to the expectation that the existing conditions will be transformed by supernatural powers into an ideal world of peace and prosperity.

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[169] For Lu Xiujing's complaints about the violations of the Daoist rules and regulations see *Lu xiansheng daomen kelüe* 陸先生道門科略 (DZTY 1118), in *WWDZ*, vol. 24, p. 779c-782b.

[170] Cf. Jens Østergard Petersen, "The anti-messianism of the Taiping jing," *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions*, 3 (1990), pp. 1–41.

Eschatological and millenarian ideas were part of the intellectual and religious tradition in China from at least the Han dynasty. They were intimately related to prophecies (*chen*) transmitted orally or in written texts. From the end of the Han dynasty on, prophetic literature of the *Chenwei* type was officially proscribed, which implies that it was heterodox. The effort to suppress prophetic texts is understandable since prophecies about the imminent end of the present conditions threatened the political stability and the legitimacy of these very conditions. A religious tradition hoping for official recognition and support had to keep a distance to beliefs that could possibly be regarded as undermining the authority of the ruling dynasty. Since prophecies and millenarian beliefs were part of the cultural tradition and could not be simply eradicated, the formation of state-supported orthodoxies required strategies to neutralize the prophetic texts and the millenarian expectations connected with them. For Confucianism, the process of eliminating the prophecies and millenarian ideas from the canonical tradition was largely completed by the end of the Han dynasty. Within the Daoist tradition, the formation of orthodoxies equally resulted in the domestication and elimination of millenarian beliefs. They were domesticated by interpreting the imminent changes of the present condition in a transcendental context without open political implications. Where domestication of this kind was not possible, millenarian traditions were relegated to the sphere of heterodoxy and thus eliminated from the orthodox religions. In the case of Daoism and Buddhism this elimination of millenarian elements happened only centuries after the formation of a Confucian orthodoxy.

Eschatology in Daoist scriptures

It seems that the political and social instability of the fourth and fifth centuries contributed to the increase of latent eschatological and millenarian expectations. One of the clearest examples in Daoist literature is the *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* 太上洞淵神咒經 (*Highest Scripture on the Divine Incantations of the Depth of the Caverns*), which probably originated at the end of the Western Jin dynasty[171] In its present form the text is

[171] *Taishang dongyuan shenzhou jing* 太上洞淵神咒經 (DZTY 334), in *WWDZ*, vol. 6, pp. 1–80. This text has been studied by Christine Mollier, *Une apocalypse taoïste du Ve siècle. Le Livre des Incantations des Grottes Abyssales* (Mémoires de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises; 31), Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises,

clearly influenced by Buddhist ideas. It is an eschatological scripture depicting the apocalyptic events foreshadowing the end of the world. After the great cataclysm a new and perfect world will be established, which will be ruled by the expected True Lord (*zhenjun* 真君).

The catastrophes of the final age will be marked by natural disasters, bad harvests, and the loss of all moral order. All kinds of diseases and epidemics brought by the demons of death will ravage the evildoers. Only the believers, who have received this sacred scripture, will escape the general destruction of the final age.[172] They will be freed from all miseries and belong to the elect who are privileged to see the True Lord. The True Lord will appear very soon. Before his appearance there will be great turmoil and the existing world (*tianxia* 天下) will finally be annihilated. Then a new heaven and a new earth will be formed (*geng sheng tiandi* 更生天地) that will be ruled by the True Lord. In this new world only the true believers will live together with the saints and immortals as the attendants of the True Lord.[173]

The name of the True Lord is Li Hong 李弘, which is given in a coded form as *Muzi Gongkou* 木子弓口.[174] The figure of Li Hong as the expected ruler of the new age resumes a tradition that can be traced back to the beginning of the fourth century where it appears in popular sectarianism. According to the *Taishang Dongyuan shenzhou jing*, Li Hong will be the king of the new world and there will be great joy among the people. In this new world each sowing will lead to nine crops, humans will live for three thousand years and thereafter be transformed to another existence. The course of nature will be unhampered by unusual events, sun and moon will shine continuously (i.e., there will be no eclipses). However, only the believers, who have received this sacred scripture, will enjoy the presence of the True Lord. It is therefore necessary to convert the ignorant people to this true teaching to save them from illness, death, and all misfortune.[175]

This is not the political utopia of an ideal society in this world but a religious eschatology referring to a new world. The expected new world is not just an improved and morally reformed version of the

1990. Some of the relevant passages are translated by Seidel, "The image of the perfect ruler in early Taoist messianism," pp, 238 f.

[172] *Dongyuan shenzhou jing, j.* 1, in *WWDZ*, p. 3b.

[173] *Dongyuan shenzhou jing, j.* 1, in *WWDZ*, p. 5b.

[174] The four characters *mu zi gong kou* can be combined to the name Li Hong.

[175] *Dongyuan shenzhou jing, j.* 1, in *WWDZ*, p. 5b.

existing world or a restoration of the ideal conditions of high antiquity—as in the Confucian utopias of the Han dynasty. What is expected here is not a reform of the existing conditions but the end of this temporal world and the formation of a new transcendental world. The conditions of the temporal world are transcended in various regards: The human life-span will be three thousand years, men will be one *zhang* 丈 and three *cun* 寸 high (about 4 metres) and they will raise phoenix, unicorn, and lion as domestic animals.[176] This transcendental eschatology is part of a teaching of salvation promising to the true believers a future life in the paradise-like new world. While the ignorant who despise this true teaching are doomed to annihilation because of their sins, the elect who have received this scripture will be redeemed through the interference of all celestial powers and attain eternal bliss.[177] The salvation promised in the *Dongyuan shenzhou jing* points to a new life in a celestial paradise. Hence, it clearly transcends the millenarian hopes of earlier traditions as for instance in the *Taiping jing*.[178]

Even if the expected new world implies a total change of the present conditions, that is, an end of the existing world, it seems that this new world was expected in the immediate future. For it is the present age that shows all the symptoms of corruption and moral decadence foreshadowing the destruction of the world and the annihilation of the sinners. Only the true believers venerating this scripture will escape the impending catastrophe.[179] There is, however, a certain tension between the descriptions of an apocalyptic end of the present world and the coming of the new world on the one hand, and some historical allusions in the first *juan* of the *Dongyuan shenzhou jing* on the other. There, a connection is suggested between the appearance of Li Hong and the rise of the house of Liu 劉, which is probably a reference to Liu Yu 劉裕, the founder of the (Liu) Song 宋 dynasty (420–479).

[176] *Dongyuan shenzhou jing, j.* 1, in *WWDZ*, p. 5c.

[177] The opposition between the ignorant people who indulge in evil deeds and those who believe and will be saved by the heavenly hosts is described in several odes contained in *juan* 14 (*WWDZ*, pp. 51–55).

[178] In one ode we read: "Today happiness will be installed and your ancestors of seven generations will be born in heaven. You will live in [the world of] long life and return to the ten heavens. Jade maidens will come down and confer their benevolent love upon you. You disciples pay homage three times and happiness will last for a thousand springs." (*j.* 14, in *WWDZ*, p. 54a). This is clearly the description of a celestial paradise.

[179] Cf. Mollier's translation of the first chapter (*Une apocalypse taoïste*, pp. 101, 105 f *et passim*).

The religious expectation of a new transcendental world is thus used for political propaganda declaring the rule of the house of Liu as the precondition of the appearance of the True Lord Li Hong. Still, the integration of this political propaganda in the eschatological scenario of the text is only superficial. It does not fit with the affirmation that the existing world will be completely destroyed and only the believers will survive.[180] Furthermore, the new world will by no means be ruled by the house of Liu but by the True Lord. These inner contradictions of the text suggest that the prophecies about the rule of the house of Liu and the eschatological expectations originally did not belong together.[181]

Similar eschatological beliefs can be found in other Daoist scriptures of the Southern and Northern Dynasties.[182] The *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji* 上清後聖道君列記 (*Annals of the Lord of the Dao, Sage of the Latter [Age] of the Highest Purity*),[183] which belongs to the Shangqing tradition of the fifth century, describes the Sage of the Latter Age (*housheng* 後聖)[184] as a saviour. When he appears the sinners will be destroyed by epidemics, floods, and conflagrations, while the elect (*zhongmin,* "seed people") will escape these catastrophes and be rescued. The name of the Sage of the Latter Age is Li Hongyuan 李弘元, which is very similar to the True Lord Li Hong of the *Dongyuan shenzhou jing.* Both texts share the interpretation of the coming rule of Li Hong(yuan) as a transcendent paradise that stands in sharp contrast to the mundane world. Rather than hoping for the beginning of a new era of the present world in which the Great Peace would be realized, they imagine

[180] *Dongyuan shenzhou jing, j.* 1, in *WWDZ,* pp. 4c, 5b.

[181] In its present form the oldest parts of the text (*juan* one to ten) seem to go back to the end of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420), i.e. the early fifth century. It should be noted, however, that Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933) in his preface traces the scripture back to the last years of the Western Jin (265–316), i.e., the early fourth century. It may well be that the text integrates older traditions, which would explain its heterogeneity.

[182] For an overview of Daoist scriptures with apocalyptic contents see Mollier, *Une apocalypse taoïste,* pp. 22–25.

[183] *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji* 上清後聖道君列記 (DZTY 441), in *WWDZ,* vol. 6, pp. 744–749. The text is translated in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist scriptures,* pp. 339–362, see also Michel Strickmann, *Le Taoïsme du Mao Chan*, pp. 209–224.

[184] The exact meaning of *housheng* is not clear. Michel Strickmann (*Le Taoïsme du Mao Chan,* p. 209) translates "sage à venir", while Robinet (*La révélation du Shangqing,* vol. 2, p. 107) argues that *housheng* should be understood in analogy to *houtian* 後天 ("l'époque actuelle") as opposed to *qiantian* 前天 ("avant la formation du monde"). Depending on the context, both interpretations seem justified. My translation "sage of the latter age" tries to confer both meanings.

the realm of Great Peace in another world inhabited by immortals.[185] The political implications are, therefore, weak. There is no expectation of a new temporal rule but the hope to be saved in a new world.

During the fourth and fifth centuries, eschatological ideas were not confined to the southern Shangqing tradition of Daoism but were widespread also in the North. According to the *History of the Wei Dynasty* eschatological beliefs were a common feature of Daoism: Like the Buddhists the Daoists believed in a sequence of different ages and taught that the world will be completely destroyed at the end of each *kalpa* (*jie* 劫).[186] Eschatological motives are also apparent in the new Daoism of Kou Qianzhi. In the revelation received by Kou Qianzhi, Li Puwen 李譜文 demands a reform of the Daoist religion because mankind is presently experiencing the final period of a *kalpa*. Only the believers who practise the new form of Kou Qianzhi's Daoism will be the elect of the True Lord (*zhenjun zhongmin*).[187] Unlike the *Dongyuan shenzhou jing,* Kou Qianzhi does not consider the new age of the True Lord as a transcendental paradise, but he expects the Great Peace to be realized during the reign of emperor Taiwudi.[188]

Both the *Dongyuan shenzhou jing* in the South and Kou Qianzhi in the North take up millenarian expectations widespread in the fourth and fifth centuries. They both transform the popular belief in an approaching new age of peace and prosperity into a means of political propaganda and legitimation. The political leaders have their own rule interpreted as being part of a predicted scenario of salvation. It is their task to order the world according to the revealed laws of the *Dao* and thus to prepare the realization of the Great Peace. In the first case, the rule of the house of Liu is declared to be the precondition of the advent of the True Lord; in the second case, it is the Wei emperor Taiwudi whose rule is eschatologically interpreted. In this way the potentially dangerous millenarian expectations of the popular sects were politically neutralized. It is doubtful, however, that these efforts of the politically powerful to utilize the popular millenarian hopes for their propaganda and to domesticate the latent eschatological expectations were successful. The popular eschatological beliefs differed from

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[185] Cf. *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji,* in *WWDZ,* vol. 6., pp. 745b/c.

[186] *Weishu, j.* 114, p. 3048.

[187] *Weishu, j.* 114, pp. 3051 f.

[188] See above p. 60.

these domesticated forms of millenarian propaganda and opposed to the existing social and political conditions.

Millenarian beliefs in popular sects

The *Laojun yinsong jie jing* 老君音誦戒經 (*Scripture of Lord Lao about the Precepts to be Recited*), a scripture revealed to Kou Qianzhi, explicitly castigates the prevailing millenarian expectations. They are condemned as false teachings disturbing the people with their vicious influence. These sects delude the common people declaring "*Laojun* will soon rule, Li Hong will appear." The common people are attracted by such teachings and numerous are therefore the self-styled Liu Jus 劉舉 and Li Hongs. In reality, however, they are just runaway criminals, serfs, and *yamen*-runners,[189] which means that they belong to the lower classes. The sects against which these polemics are directed worshipped the same deity as Kou Qianzhi: *Laojun*, the deified Laozi. It is *Laojun* who speaks in the scripture and blames the popular sects for using his name. Thus, these heterodox forms of millenarianism used the same religious symbols as the orthodox forms.

Li Hong is referred to in the *Dongyuan shenzhou jing* as the prophesied king who will rule the new world. Also the popular sects of the fourth century expect Li Hong as the future king. In 322 a disciple of the sect leader Li Tuo was called Li Hong and declared to be the prophesied king.[190] This happened in Anhui. Two decades later, in 342, there was a man in Shandong who claimed to be Li Hong. He attracted a large following and appointed officials.[191] He sought to organize his sect after the model of the imperial administration and to install the rule of Li Hong. Similar cases are repeatedly reported throughout the fourth and fifth centuries. Thus, the *Laojun yinsong jie jing* does not seem to exaggerate when it laments that "year after year, there are persons who pretend to be Li Hong."[192] How widespread the expectation of Li Hong was, can be seen from its appearance in such distant regions as Gansu, Shandong, and Hubei.[193]

[189] *Laojun yinsong jie jing* 老君音誦戒經 (DZTY 779), in *WWDZ*, vol. 18, pp. 211c-212a.

[190] See above p. 75.

[191] *Jinshu*, *j.* 106, 2772; *Zizhi tongjian*, *j.* 97, p. 3052.

[192] *Taishang Laojun yinsong jie jing*, in *WWDZ*, vol. 18, p. 211c.

[193] The sources referring to Li Hong from the fourth century on have been collected by Tang Changru 唐長孺, "Shiji yu daojing zhong suo jian de Li Hong 史籍

This wide geographical distribution of the beliefs about Li Hong suggest that they had already a longer history when in the fourth century they first appear in the sources. The expectation of a sage surnamed Li can be traced back to the first century. During the reign of Wang Mang there was a prophecy: "One surnamed Liu is to rise again and one surnamed Li will be his assistant."[194] Liu was the surname of the Han emperors, and the prediction thus refers to the restoration of the Han dynasty. A dim reflex of these prophecies is still visible in the *Dongyuan shenzhou jing* where the expectation of the True Lord Li Hong is combined with the propaganda for the house of Liu. Likewise, the *Laojun yinsong jie jing* mentions the expectation of Li Hong and Liu Ju. From the early years of the first century on, messianic prophecies referring to the surnames Li and Liu were transmitted through the centuries.

Events of the early fourth century show how widespread these prophecies were. In 303, at the same time when Li Te and his family revolted against the Jin rule to establish the Cheng dynasty,[195] a certain Zhang Chang 張昌 started a rebellion in Hubei. His troops, which amounted to thirty thousand men and consisted mainly of landless peasants, pressed hard on the Jin forces. Like Li Te, Zhang Chang belonged to the non-Han population. His rebellion shows that prophecies about the names Li and Liu exerted significant influence on the common people. The *Jin shu* reports that at that time there was great distress in the empire. Misery nourished the latent hopes for a change of the dynasty. Some astrologers predicted that a new emperor would appear north of the Yangtze river. Zhang Chang used these expectations to incite the widespread discontent and to gather a following. In his political propaganda against the Jin dynasty he changed his name to Li Chen 李辰 and spread prophecies: "A sage is about to appear who will become the ruler of the people."[196] Then he declared his ally Qiu Shen 丘沈 to be this expected sage and proclaimed him emperor. Simultaneously he had Qiu Shen's name changed to Liu Ni 劉尼,

與道經所見的李弘," in *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi lun shiyi* 魏晉南北朝論拾遺, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983, pp. 208–217.

[194] *Hou Hanshu*, *j.* 15, p. 573. The *Zizhi tongjian* (*j.* 30, p. 1225) relates a slightly different version: "The house of Han is about to rise again and one surnamed Li will be its assistant".

[195] See above p. 65.

[196] *Zizhi tongjian*, *j.* 85, p. 1680; *Jinshu*, *j.* 100, p. 2613 has only "A sage is about to appear".

claiming him to be a descendant of the imperial house of Han. Zhang Chang, alias Li Chen, made himself chancellor of this new government. Thus, the old prophecies about a ruler surnamed Liu with a counsellor surnamed Li were taken up.

Although in this case the name Li Hong is not mentioned, there is no doubt that this figure is connected with the same prophetic traditions transmitted from the Han dynasty on. It seems, however, that only during the fourth century the name Li Hong became common, whereas before the surname Li alone was significant. The surname Li had a religious and messianic connotation that was deeply rooted in the popular culture. It might be that the Sect of the Li Adepts (*Lijia dao* or *Lishi zhi dao*)[197] mentioned by Ge Hong refers to this popular messianic tradition. At least in some circles the surname Li seems to have been regarded as essential for the fulfilling of the age-old prophecies, which explains why Zhang Chang changed his name to Li Chen.[198]

The surname Li in this context is evidently a reference to Laozi. The *Laojun bianhua wuji jing* 老君變化無極經 (*Infinite scripture on the transformations of Lord Lao*), a text from the fifth century, tells that Laozi after converting the barbarians manifested himself again during the Former Han dynasty. He took the name Muzi Gongkou, a coded form of Li Hong, and lived in Chengdu where he transmitted his teaching to the three Zhangs.[199] Even if texts that explicitly identify Laozi with the expected king Li do not date earlier than the fifth century, we may assume that traditions connecting the beginning of a new age with the appearance of Laozi were current since the Han dynasty. From the Han period on, Laozi was regarded as a deity manifesting itself in the

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[197] See above p. 72.

[198] One could suspect that other sect leaders such as Li Kuan and Li Tuo, who both were called Li Eight Hundred, had also only assumed the surname Li to use the prestige of this name and to identify themselves with the famous Li Eight Hundred i.e., Li A. After the rebellion of Sun En and Lu Xun there was another Li Tuo connected with a rebellion of non-Han people in 411 (*Zizhi tongjian, j.* 115, pp. 3645 f). The identity of names may be a coincidence, but it could also be a conscious reference to the Li Tuo of the fourth century.

[199] *Laojun bianhua wuji jing* 老君變化無極經 (DZTY 1185), in *WWDZ*, vol. 28, p. 372a. In the *Santian neijie jing* (*WWDZ*, vol. 28, p. 413c) Li Hong is listed as one of the Laozi's transformations. The identification of Laozi with Li Hong is also alluded to in the *Lingbao lüeji* 靈寶略記 (quoted in *Yunji qiqian, j.* 3, p. 12a), which probably dates from the Tang. It states that *Taishang Dadaojun* 太上大道君, i.e. Laozi, in the first year of the Kaihuang 開皇 era (581 CE) was reborn in a western country in the womb of a woman named Hong 洪.

course of history under different names to reveal the divine *dao*. As early as in the first century BCE the *Tianguan li baoyuan taiping jing* bases the vision of the Great Peace on a revelation. The text was said to have been revealed by *Chijing zi*, the Master of the Red Essence. The same name occurs in the *Laozi bianhua jing*, which reports that *Chijing zi* was a manifestation of Laozi.[200] Shortly afterwards, during the reign of Wang Mang, for the first time the prophecy is attested that the Han dynasty would be re-established under the rule of the house of Liu with the assistance of a sage surnamed Li. It seems that the name Li here refers to the role of Laozi as teacher of the ideal ruler of the Great Peace.

The *Taiping jing* is also attributed to one of Laozi's manifestations.[201] In its present version, which is a reconstruction from several texts, the *Taiping jing* says that the Sage of the Latter Age (*housheng*) is surnamed Li.[202] Unfortunately, the dating of various parts of the present *Taiping jing* is too uncertain to allow any definite conclusion about its exact content during the Later Han. In any case, however, Xiang Kai and Zhang Jiao, whose connection with the *Taiping jing* cannot reasonably be denied, venerated Huang-Lao, that is, Laozi. It does not seem far-fetched to assume that from the Han dynasty on there was a tradition about Laozi manifesting himself under different names to act as adviser to sage-rulers in different times. Hence his appearance was expected as a precondition of a new age of peace and justice. It is, however, not before the fourth century that the name of this Sage of the Latter Age is specified as Li Hong. We may assume, therefore, that the earlier tradition referred only to the surname Li, which was the surname of

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[200] Cf. above note 17.

[201] According to Tang Yongtong (*Han Wei liang Jin Nanbei chao fojiao shi,* pp. 59 f) the *Sandong zhunang* 三洞珠囊, *j.* 9 quotes the *Huahu jing* 化胡經 reporting that Laozi after converting the Western barbarians returned to China and composed the *Taiping jing.* The *Huahu jing* was probably written during the Western Jin (265–316).—As has been mentioned above, later tradition attributed the revelation of the *Taiping jing* to Gan Ji (or Yu Ji), who was considered to be one of Laozi's transformations (*Santian neijie jing*, in *WWDZ*, vol. 28, p. 414a.

[202] *Taiping jing hejiao*, p. 2. This passage is usually regarded as a later interpolation, with the *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji* (*WWDZ*, vol. 6, p. 744a) as one of its sources. However, it should be noted that the *Taiping jing* and the *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji* differ slightly. Above all, the *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji* gives the name of the Sage of the Latter Age as Li Hongyuan, while the *Taiping jing* has only the surname Li. The possibility that both texts derive from a common source that originated when Li Hong was not yet established as the name of the Sage of the Latter Age should be considered.

the "historical" Laozi. That Li Hong was regarded as a manifestation of *Laojun* is evident from the *Laojun yinsong jie jing*, where *Laojun* blames the numerous Li Hongs for pretending to speak in his name.[203] Although this text dates from the fifth century it refers to popular beliefs that had a long history.

The majority of the numerous groups who referred to the imminent coming of the saviour Li were considered heterodox by the elites. The sources sadly do not permit a detailed reconstruction of the transmission of these popular eschatological beliefs and the sectarian groups that carried them. In any case, during the fourth and fifth centuries there was quite a number of such heterodox millenarian sects. They derived from common sources that probably had their origins in the prophetic traditions of the Han dynasty. The Confucian scholars had eliminated prophetic texts from their orthodoxy and in this way relegated these traditions to the sphere of heterodoxy. Hence, their transmission went underground, which accounts for the scarcity of documents. The few cases reported in official sources are not more than the tip of an iceberg that happened to be noticed because of their political implications. How strong the popular eschatological traditions must have been is evident from the fact that it is reflected in many scriptures of the emerging Daoist orthodoxy. Although the Daoists were eager to draw a sharp line between their own teachings and the popular millenarian movements, they could not fully exclude eschatological beliefs from their tradition. However, they had to domesticate the political implications of the millenarian expectations, as Kou Qianzhi did by declaring the acting emperor a manifestation of the True Lord of Great Peace (*taiping zhenjun*).

Thus, the millenarian tradition of the popular sects was channelled into the new forms of Daoism supported by the elites. Nevertheless, popular millenarianism was not completely absorbed and domesticated, but continued as an underground tradition. By the fifth century it came under the influence of Buddhist symbols and motifs. The new Buddho-Daoist millenarianism is reflected in the *Taishang Lingbao Laozi huahu miaojing* 太上靈寶老子化胡妙經 (*Marvellous Scripture of the Highest Lingbao about Laozi who Converts the Barbarians*), a text found in Dunhuang.[204]

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[203] *Laojun yinsong jie jing*, in *WWDZ*, vol. 18, pp. 211c-212a.

[204] The text has been thoroughly studied by Anna Seidel, "Le sūtra merveilleux du Lingpao Suprême traitant de Lao-tseu qui convertit les barbares (le manuscript S. 2081)—Contribution à l'étude du Bouddho-taoïsme des Six Dynasties," in *Contributions*

Although it certainly originated in a Daoist milieu, it was not included in the Daoist canon. It is an eschatological scripture describing the catastrophes of the latter days and the salvation of the virtuous "seed people" (*zhongmin*) through the appearance of a deity called Celestial Venerable (*tianzun* 天尊). The Celestial Venerable is identified not only with Laozi but also with the Buddha.[205] After the destructions that usher in the final period of the present *kalpa,* the faithful will live in a new world of Great Peace (*taiping*) in the presence of the True Lord (*zhenjun*) and the future Buddha Maitreya.[206] The obvious references to Buddhism were probably the main reason for the exclusion of the text from the Daoist canon.

This scripture is an invaluable document representing millenarian beliefs of the fifth century on the level of popular syncretism. Daoist and Buddhist names and ideas were mixed freely and merged with the millenarian legacy of the popular sects. Since it was not regarded by either the Daoists or the Buddhists as belonging to their orthodox scriptural canon, it may be taken as one of the earliest scriptures of an independent sectarian tradition. In its synthesis of Daoist, Buddhist, and popular traditions it presages the main characteristic of later sects. Although there is no information about the social milieu where this kind of popular Buddho-Daoist millenarianism was propagated, we may suspect that it was far more widespread than the scarce sources suggest. The fact that the *Taishang Lingbao Laozi huahu miaojing* was transmitted for centuries until it finally found its way into the caves of Dunhuang proves that it must have enjoyed considerable popularity. Its survival in spite of not being included in the official canons proves the continuity of millenarian traditions.[207] Although there is little infor-

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aux études de Touen-houang, vol. 3, edited by M. Soymié (Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient; 135), Paris: École Française d'Extrême Orient, 1984, pp. 305–351.

[205] Cf. Seidel, "Le sūtra merveilleux," p. 330.

[206] *Taishang Lingbao Laozi huahu miaojing,* translated by Seidel, "Le sūtra merveilleux," p. 348.

[207] A difficult question that cannot be treated in the present context concerns the social milieu of the millenarian scriptures that were included into the Daoist canon, e.g. the *Dongyuan shenzhou jing* and the *Shangqing housheng daojun lieji.* Although the *Shangqing* text probably did not address a lower class audience, it displays a "sectarian" attitude since salvation is restricted to the elected few and the rest is doomed to destruction. According to Mollier's analysis (*Une apocalypse taoïste,* pp. 72–74), the sect which had the *Shenzhou jing* as its sacred scripture derived from the tradition of the Heavenly Masters, but clearly understood itself as a separate community explicitly criticizing some of the Heavenly Masters' practices. On the other hand Buddhist influences are quite obvious.

mation about the religious communities that propagated these beliefs, their sense of belonging to the elected few who are the true believers destined to be saved from the catastrophes of the final age clearly distinguished them from conventional Buddhists and Daoists.In this respect we may call them sectarian movements.

Depending on the perspective, the early history of the Daoist religion appears in different light. Retrospectively, it may be described as the evolution of the Daoist church founded by Zhang Daoling in the early second century, the formation of religious institutions, rituals, and a scriptural tradition that was finally canonized in the fifth century. Seen in the contemporary context, however, this development was less straight-lined. The Five Pecks of Rice Sect then appears as a popular religious movement similar to many other religious groups of the Han dynasty. From the perspective of the Confucian elites it was not more respectable than any other popular sect. Although as early as the Former Han dynasty popular religious movements had scriptures, they were not part of the elite culture. These scriptures were not accepted as contributions to the intellectual discourses of the elites. There, the Daoist teachings of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* 莊子 were discussed by scholars such as Wang Bi 王弼 (226–249) and Guo Xiang 郭象 (died 312) who based their arguments on the Confucian scriptures instead of the literature produced in the religious milieus of the Daoists. The religious discourses in the Daoist milieus, with their reference to revealed scriptures, were based on other rules than those of the elite culture. In this sense, they were popular religious movements. However, sociologically speaking they penetrated all layers of society. As the wide use of scriptures shows, they were not confined to the lower classes but their members included men and women who were educated and sometimes close to the power elite of their time.

The popular religious traditions out of which the Daoist movement grew were multifarious and scattered. There was no unified organization, and even the tradition of the Heavenly Masters split into many independent groups after the end of Zhang Lu's rule. Depending on individual leaders, their charismatic qualities and skills at organization, some sectarian groups gained a large following, while many others probably did not leave any traces in historical records. However, they all belonged to similar religious milieus and shared many beliefs and practices. This common tradition was the seedbed for many religious

groups. Most of them were not included in the pedigree of the evolving Daoist orthodoxy. In particular sectarian groups accused of rebellion, such as the *Taiping dao* and the many would-be Li Hong's, had the odium of heterodoxy. The formation of Daoism as an orthodox, that is, state-supported, religion was therefore also a process of elimination. To be orthodox, Daoism had to be purged from elements that were not in accord with the values and norms of the elite culture.

Unlike the many popular religious movements founded during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Daoism succeeded in transforming itself into a state-supported religion with canonical scriptures that became part of the literary tradition of the elite culture. This development from a sect movement to an orthodox church secured official patronage, but the price to be paid was political control. Many other popular religious groups, which were not prepared to pay this price and did not maintain close relations with the ruling elites, were left behind. The elimination of certain beliefs and practices from the Daoist orthodoxy did not make them disappear. Instead, they remained within the cultural space of popular religion, which was a reservoir of ideas and symbols from which later religious movements drew their inspiration.

CHAPTER THREE

HETERODOX MOVEMENTS IN MEDIEVAL BUDDHISM

When in the first century CE Buddhism was introduced into China, it already had a history of some five hundred years in India and Central Asia. There it had developed into a mature religion with a huge corpus of scriptures, elaborate rituals, well-defined religious teachings, sophisticated metaphysics, and a clerical organization. This comprehensive religious and philosophical tradition of Buddhism had no match on Chinese soil. Neither the Confucian and Huang-Lao philosophies, nor the religious practices of the aristocracy and the common people constituted a unified and systematically explicated religious tradition comparable to Buddhism. The success of Buddhism in China during the centuries after its first introduction into the Middle Kingdom is without doubt due to the innovative impulses of this foreign religion. It made available new modes of religious experiences and practices, and it offered new approaches to philosophical thinking that responded to the religious and intellectual needs of the time much more than all that traditional Chinese culture had to offer. Even though the full reach of Buddhist teaching and its metaphysical theories were understood only slowly, their intellectual and religious force with the backing of a vital and developed foreign religion must have been felt even in the early stages.

When from the fourth century on an ever increasing number of translations of Buddhist scriptures allowed a more comprehensive understanding of the religious and intellectual scope of the Buddhist tradition, there was virtually no Chinese counterpart that could compete with it. It was in this situation that in some intellectual circles opposition arose against the foreign religion that seemed to overshadow the native cultural tradition. One of the native reactions was the polemics of Confucian scholars against Buddhism. Another one was the efforts to transform the native religious traditions—heterogeneous and intellectually undemanding as they were—into the elaborate system of Daoism with its own scriptural canon, rituals, and clerical orders competing with the Buddhist *saṃgha* for imperial favour.

The history of Buddhism in medieval China left its most manifest traces in the mass of translations of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Chinese, a work that started during the Han dynasty and was continued until the Song. The increasing demand for Buddhist scriptures, whose translation and distribution were often sponsored by emperors and pious laypersons, is evidence of the growing appeal that the foreign religion had to the educated class. To a certain degree the Buddhist conquest of China was a conquest of the Chinese elites who alone had the time and education to engage in literary studies and metaphysical speculations. Less well documented than the translation activities is the influence of Buddhism on the religious life of the aristocracy and the common people.

One of the earliest traces of Buddhism in China is the account on Liu Ying 劉英, king of Chu 楚 and son of emperor Guangwudi 光武帝 (r. 25–57). The *History of the Later Han Dynasty* reports that he worshipped the Buddha together with Huang-Lao.[1] About a century later a similar combination of the cult of Huang-Lao and reverence for the Buddha is attested at the court of emperor Huandi (r. 147–167) in a memorial of Xiang Kai.[2] Both cases show that a certain knowledge of Buddhism had reached the highest aristocracy as early as the Later Han dynasty. The cult of the Buddha was regarded as belonging to the same type of religious practice as the cult of Huang-Lao. One may suspect, therefore, that the distinctive features of the Buddhist religion were not yet fully recognized. Lack of sources makes it difficult to assess the degree to which Buddhism had penetrated Chinese society by the end of the second century. Although it was certainly still a marginal phenomenon, one cannot overlook the fact that the educated class had some knowledge of it and some members of the elites and even emperors were attracted to it. This does not mean, however, that knowledge of Buddhism remained confined to the narrow circles of the upper class. In the last decade of the second century the local official Zhai Rong 窄融 erected a large Buddhist temple in the region of Pengcheng 彭成, the same region where the first known cult of the Buddha had been established by Liu Ying some hundred fifty years earlier. Zhai Rong's initiative seems to have responded to a popular mood that was in favour of Buddhism. The lavishly built sanctuary could host more than three thousand people; more than five thousand

[1] *Hou Hanshu, j.* 42, p. 1428.

[2] See above pp. 34 ff.

came to listen to the Buddhist teachings and accepted the religion.[3] Even if these numbers may be inflated, there is no reason to doubt that by the end of the second century Buddhist rituals and probably also some elements of the Buddhist teachings had gained some popularity in the area of Pengcheng.

Xiang Kai's memorial contains two quotations from the *Sūtra in Forty-two Sections"* (*Sishier zhang jing* 四十二章經), which proves that he was familiar with Buddhist scriptures.[4] Remember that it was Xiang Kai who proposed the teaching of the *Taiping qing ling shu* to the throne. This means that the Daoist tradition of the *Taiping jing*, of which Xiang Kai was a leading representative, in the second century had already been inspired by Buddhism, however slightly. One cannot rule out the possibility that some rituals and beliefs known from the Daoist sects of the late Han are due to Buddhist influence: the ritual confessions of sins, the prohibition of alcohol or the ritual recitation of sacred scriptures. However, the available evidence does not allow for a definite conclusion. We can be sure, however, that the use of incense, which is attested for the sect of Yu Ji in the late second century,[5] was inspired by Buddhist rituals, since this practice was introduced into China from India. Incidentally, Yu Ji's sect belonged to the same tradition of the *Taiping jing* as Xiang Kai. Thus, even in the early stages of its development in China, Buddhism gained access to both the ruling class and religious groups of the popular culture.

An examination of Buddhism during the Later Han is instructive for understanding the multifarious role this religion played in Chinese history. For it shows that Buddhism made its influence felt in quite different forms and contexts. On the one hand, there were foreign monks like An Shigao 安世高 and others who brought with them a thorough knowledge of Buddhism, its teachings, practices, and monastic institutions. They, and possibly some Chinese converts, represented Buddhism as a distinct religion clearly separated from the otherwise prevailing religious teachings and communities. On the other hand, there were Chinese people from all layers of the society who were attracted by certain aspects of Buddhism and integrated them into

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[3] *Sanguozhi, j.* 49, p. 1185. Cf. Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China*, Leiden: Brill, 1959, vol. 1, pp. 27 f.; Tsukamoto Zenryū, *A history of early Chinese Buddhism. From its introduction to the death of Hui-yüan*, Tokyo, 1985, pp. 72–79.

[4] Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China,* p. 38.

[5] See above p. 70.

their own religious thinking and acting. It would hardly be justified to call people "Buddhists" merely because they included worship of the Buddha in their usual offerings made to the gods. Nor can we regard a sect as "Buddhist" just because it made use of incense. Thus, apart from Buddhism as a distinct religion there was an infiltration of certain Buddhist elements into Chinese society and its religious traditions. This diffusion of Buddhist features in social and religious contexts outside the realm of distinct Buddhism may conveniently be named "diffused Buddhism".[6] The impact of Buddhism on the Chinese culture can only be adequately assessed if we pay due attention to the diffused forms of Buddhism. For Buddhist beliefs and notions exerted their influence far beyond the well-defined sphere of Buddhist monks and lay believers. Below the level of distinct Buddhism the diffused forms of Buddhism merged with other religious traditions, which in this way were transformed under its influence.

The popular sects, which mainly derived from the religious tradition regarded as Daoist, were likewise receptive of the increasing influence of Buddhism. When from the late fourth century on the heterogeneous Daoist tradition was gradually systematized into a well-defined distinct religion, Buddhist elements had already found their way into this tradition. The orthodox Daoists tried to restrain Buddhist influence as they attempted to transform Daoism into a distinct religion comparable to Buddhism. On the level of popular religion, however, there was no need to draw a sharp line between Buddhist and Daoist elements, which were accordingly easily merged. Thus, the popular religious traditions were equally transformed. They combined diffused Buddhist and Daoist beliefs and practices with local traditions to form a new kind of popular religion. Although these popular religious traditions were by no means homogeneous and the transition to the orthodox forms of either Buddhism or Daoism was gradual, they cannot simply be regarded as depraved versions of the orthodox religions. They had

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[6] The notions of "distinct" and "diffused" forms of a religion are inspired by C.K. Yang's distinction between "institutionalized" and "diffused" religion (C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese society. A study of contemporary social functions of religion and some of their historical factors*, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967, ch. 12). However, "diffused" and "institutionalized" forms of religion do not exclude each other, since in popular sects we find diffused elements of Buddhism although as social organizations they were institutionalized. I prefer, therefore, to contrast "diffused" to "distinct" forms of a religion or tradition. "Distinct Buddhism" refers to exclusive Buddhist institutions with formal membership through ordination or lay initiation.

their own beliefs and practices and also social organizations. Since the advocates of the orthodox religions denounced these popular cults and sects, they obviously viewed them as something different. Indeed, the claim to orthodoxy implied the exclusion of popular religious movements as heterodox.

The general development of Buddhism after its introduction during the Han dynasty does not concern us here. Suffice it to note that between the third and the fifth centuries Buddhism succeeded in penetrating the elite culture of both the northern and the southern dynasties. Although its success was not unopposed and several times suffered severe setbacks, culminating in the persecutions of 445 and 574, the long-term development secured Buddhism a leading role in the religious and social life. Even the defeats witness its imposing success: When between 574 and 576 emperor Wudi 武帝 of the Northern Zhou 周 dynasty (557–581) launched an extensive suppression of Buddhism, about forty thousand temples and monasteries were destroyed or confiscated and the number of monks and nuns forced to return to secular life amounted to three million.[7] Though this was a hard stroke it did not change the course of history for long, and the influence of Buddhism finally reached its climax during the Tang 唐 dynasty (618–907). It was only after the notorious suppression of 845 that a certain turning point was reached. Thereafter the impact of Buddhism on the intellectual life of the elites was gradually reduced and finally overshadowed by the new Confucianism of the Song scholars. In the religious sphere, however, Buddhism had penetrated Chinese society to such a degree that even the rise of Neo-Confucianism could not affect its status as the major religion in China.

1. Critique of Buddhism as a Heterodox Religion

The triumph of Buddhism in medieval China was the end result of a process that transformed an exotic and marginal religion propagated mainly by foreigners into an orthodox religion respected by the majority of the Chinese elites and often lavishly sustained by the imperial courts. This transformation was far from being natural, for the foreign religion

[7] *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀, by Fei Changfang 費長房 (T 2034), in *Taishō*, vol. 49, p. 94a. The numbers are probably not to be taken at face value, but they indicate the enormous role of Buddhism.

was not wholeheartedly embraced by the political and intellectual elites. Buddhism had to face considerable opposition, first from the side of conservatively minded literati and from the fifth century increasingly from Daoists. Since the Daoist traditions had been transformed into an orthodox religion, Daoism became the principal rival of Buddhism. Both religions competed for political and material support from the ruling classes.

Opposition to Buddhism took different forms reaching from intellectual and political debates to persecution and destruction of Buddhist sanctuaries. While until the end of the third century anti-Buddhist polemics seem to have been rare,[8] from the fourth century on the growing influence of Buddhism and its clerical institutions brought about strong anti-Buddhist feelings in certain circles of the political elite.[9] Erik Zürcher has distinguished four types of arguments levelled against Buddhism in the fourth and early fifth centuries: a) Buddhism and in particular its monastic institutions are undermining the authority of the government and endanger the stability and prosperity of the state (political and economical arguments); b) the monastic life is useless and unproductive because it does not yield any concrete results in this world (utilitarian arguments); c) Buddhism is a "barbarian" religion not suited to the superior cultural tradition of China (nationalist arguments); d) the monastic life violates the rules of propriety and is therefore antisocial and highly immoral (moral arguments).[10]

At first sight these arguments do not seem to be directed against the Buddhist teachings but rather against its social manifestations. The Buddhist monks claimed not to be submitted to the rules governing secular life, they refused to pay homage to the emperor and abandoned even the duties towards their parents. Since they were not engaged in productive labour their critics regarded them as parasites. Behind these political and moral arguments, however, laid an ideological conflict.

[8] The apologetic Buddhist text *Mouzi lihuo lun* 牟子理惑論 (*Master Mou on the Removing of Doubts*) would be a proof that already in the late second or early third century Buddhism was facing intellectual critique, if it was really composed by its pretended author. For a number of reasons, however, I follow Zürcher (*The Buddhist conquest of China,* p. 15) who regards it as a forgery of the fourth or early fifth century. The different opinions about the time of composition have been summarized by John P. Keenan, *How Master Mou removes our doubts. A reader-response study and translation of the 'Mou-tzu Li-huo lun'*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, pp. 3–7.

[9] For a convenient list of the debates between Buddhists and its opponents see Schmidt-Glintzer and Jansen, "Religionsdebatten und Machtkonflikte," pp. 72–83.

[10] Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China,* p. 255.

For the Buddhists the monastic life of the *saṃgha* with its own rules and regulations was the core of religious life. It was nothing that could be easily abandoned in favour of the rules of secular society. Their demand of being exempted from the fundamental rules of the state and the society challenged the Confucian understanding of the natural order of the world. For traditionally minded scholars and statesmen there was only one legitimate order of the society, secured by the rules of propriety that had been transmitted from the ancient sages.[11] Thus, the Buddhist demand not to be subjected to these rules implicitly denied the cosmological foundation of the Chinese social order. From this perspective it is easy to understand that the right of monks not to bow before the emperor was repeatedly a matter of dispute.[12] It is remarkable, however, that in spite of the considerable implications of the matter for the Confucians, the Buddhists were able to refuse ritual subordination under the temporal rule. At least in the South the social influence of the *saṃgha* was apparently strong enough to prevent harsh measures from the side of the ruling authorities.

Until the fifth century the anti-Buddhist arguments came mainly from the camp of scholar-officials concentrating on the harmful consequences Buddhism was said to have for the state and the society. From the fifth century on, the focus of the debates shifted from the political to the religious sphere. Now the main opponent to the foreign religion were Daoists. In 467 Gu Huan 顧歡 published his *Yi Xia lun* 夷夏論 (*Treatise on Barbarians and Chinese*) arguing that Buddhism as a religion of barbarian origin was not suited to China with her tradition of the scriptures of the ancient sages. This was not a new argument, but Gu Huan continued advocating that Daoism was superior to Buddhism because it was of Chinese origin.[13] It is not completely clear what kind of Daoism Gu Huan was referring to. Apparently, what he had in

[11] In his edict of 340 demanding the monks to pay due reverence to the ruler, emperor Mingdi 明帝 of the Eastern Jin argued: "If the low and the worthy are not clearly differentiated the ruler's instructions will cease to be only one. If there are two, the result will be chaos. For this reason the sages of former times have established laws and regulations to order the state." (*Hong ming ji* 弘明集, by Sen You 僧祐 (T 2102), in *Taishō*, vol. 52, *j.* 12, p. 80a)

[12] The most famous debate arose in 402 between Huan Xuan 桓玄 and the lay Buddhist Wang Mi 王謐. Cf. Tsukamoto, *A history of early Chinese Buddhism*, pp. 828–844; Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, *Das Hung-ming chi und die Aufnahme des Buddhismus in China* (Münchener Ostasiatische Studien; 12), Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1976, pp. 66–70; Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China*, pp. 231–239.

[13] *Nan Qishu* 南齊書, *j.* 54, pp. 930–934. Cf. Kenneth K.S. Ch'en, "Anti-Buddhist

mind was the philosophical teachings of Laozi and Zhuangzi rather than the ecclesiastical forms of Daoism. In his old age he lived as an eccentric recluse, who cut all contacts with other men and had the birds of the mountains eat out of his hand.[14] But since he loved the Huang-Lao teaching and was well versed in divination, he was certainly aware of the new forms of Daoism that had emerged in the fifth century.

It is not surprising that before the fifth century Daoism does not appear to have been an opponent to Buddhism. The dispersed Daoist traditions of the popular sects were no match to the elaborate religious system of Buddhism, its clerical institutions and its influence on the educated classes. Not before the fifth century were these traditions transformed into a comprehensive system of teachings and rituals with its own corpus of sacred scriptures that could appeal to the intellectual elites. In the North, Kou Qianzhi's new Heavenly Master Sect was the first case of an open opposition of Daoists to Buddhism. However, the rivalry, which led to the first great persecution of Buddhism in China, was more a political affair than an intellectual or religious dispute. In the South, the influence of Buddhism depended less on the personal inclinations of the emperors than on the deep roots it had taken in the cultural milieu of the upper classes. This was not a situation where Daoists could hope to find passionate support if they opposed Buddhism. Accordingly, when in the fifth century Daoism appeared on the intellectual battlefield, its attacks on Buddhism were first rather moderate. That Daoism was still in the weaker position is evident when Zhang Rong 張融 in his *Men lü* 門律 (*Rules for adepts*) tried to enhance the prestige of Daoism arguing that it had the same root as Buddhism and the two religions were, therefore, basically identical. Only in their outer manifestations they were different.[15] This compromising theory, however, was soon overshadowed by more open antagonism.

In the early sixth century Liu Xie 劉勰 wrote a reply to the anti-Buddhist treatise *Sanpo lun* 三破論 (*On the three destructions [caused by Buddhism]*) attributed also to Zhang Rong. In his *Miehuo lun* 滅惑論 (*Treatise on the extinction of errors*) Liu Xie tried to show that it was not

propaganda during the Nan-Ch'ao," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 15 (1952), pp. 166–192: 168–173; Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, *Das Hung-ming chi*, pp. 99–112.

[14] *Nan Qishu, j.* 54, p. 930.

[15] *Hong ming ji, j.* 6, p. 38c. For the debate between Zhang Rong and Zhou Yong 周顒 see Schmidt-Glintzer, *Das Hung-ming chi*, pp. 112–118.

Buddhism that was harmful to the society but rather Daoism.[16] He referred among others to the role of the Daoist-inspired rebellions of Zhang Jiao, of the various Li Hongs and of Sun En.[17] The intended readers of these treatises were the ruling elites whom both sides tried to convince that the other religion was detrimental and therefore heterodox. Although doctrinal questions were also a matter of dispute, it was above all the support of the elites for which the rivals contended. A famous incident is the debate of 420 between Buddhists and Daoists at the court of Northern Wei emperor Xiaomingdi 孝明帝 (r. 516–528) over the seniority of Buddha or Laozi. Both sides attempted to prove that their own patriarch had been older than the other side's and his teaching was, accordingly, to be honoured as the older one. On order of the emperor a commission investigated the matter and finally the claims of the Daoists were found to have no foundation.[18] This was the first case of a number of disputes over the priority of Buddhism or Daoism held at the imperial courts of the Northern Zhou and the Tang dynasties.[19]

Thus, in spite of the immense religious and cultural influence Buddhism had gained until the sixth century, its position as a state-supported orthodox religion continued to be a matter of debate. To be sure, the roots Buddhism had taken in all layers of the society were deep enough to prevent an elimination of the religion. However, the leading Buddhist were well aware of the dangers that could arise should there be an open flank in the latent conflict with their Daoist and Confucianist adversaries. The position of Buddhism as an orthodox religion had to be defended against opponents who were only too anxious to expose its detrimental influence on the society and its political unreliability. That these were no fictitious dangers is evident from the fact that it

[16] *Hong ming ji*, *j.* 6, pp. 49c-51c. Another refutation of the *Sanpo lun* was written by the monk Sengshun 僧順 (*Hong ming ji*, *j.* 6, pp. 51c-53c). The *Sanpo lun* itself is lost, but parts of it are quoted in the two refutations.

[17] *Hong ming ji*, *j.* 6, p. 51b/c.

[18] *Fozu lidao tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載, by Nian Chang 念常 (T 2036), in *Taishō*, vol. 49, *j.* 9, p. 547a/b. Kenneth K.S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China. A historical survey*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964, pp. 184–186.

[19] Other famous cases were the dispute during the Northern Zhou (cf. Tang Yongtong, *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbei chao Fojiao shi*, vol. 2, pp. 537–545; Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, pp. 190–194) and during the reign of the Tang emperor Gaozu 高祖 (618–626) (cf. Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 7–9). For a short summary of later debates cf. Schmidt-Glintzer and Jansen: "Religionsdebatten und Machtkonflikte," pp. 77–82.

was a political measure, that is, the Huichang 會昌 suppression of 845, which in the ninth century marked a turning point in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Thereafter it gradually lost its leading role in the intellectual life of the Chinese elites.

Since orthodox Buddhism had to make every effort not to leave the slightest doubt about its political reliability, it had to draw a sharp line between itself and certain popular manifestations of the Buddhist creed. Below the level of the highly educated scholar-monks and the great urban monasteries there was a mass of monks with little or no education, living in small temples in the countryside or making their living as preachers, fortune-tellers, doctors or miracle workers. Some of these monks gathered a following not unlike sectarian leaders, and it is this setting where the history of Buddhism and the history of popular sects approach each other.

2. Buddhism, Popular Religions, and Rebellions

The first traces of Buddhist influence on the native religions in China were the cult of the Buddha at the court of Liu Ying in the first century and at the court of emperor Huandi in the second century. In both cases the Buddha was worshipped side by side with Laozi. Thus, right from the beginning Buddhist elements mixed with traditional religious practices. This diffusion of Buddhism was not confined to the upper classes. As has been observed above, Buddhist practices, as the burning of incense, and probably also certain Buddhist ideas were assimilated by popular sects as early as the late second century. As Buddhism took roots among the lower classes and the peasant population, it became part of the popular religious tradition. Buddhist sanctuaries existed along with the shrines of popular deities.[20] We do not have many details about these popular forms of Buddhism in the third century. The cult in popular Buddhist shrines seems to have been cared for by priests or monks who did not follow the monastic rules of the *vinaya*. When in the middle of the third century the Indian

[20] *Sanguozhi, j.* 64, p. 1449 reports the case of the general Sun Lin 孫綝 (231–258) who insulted the gods venerated by the people, burned popular temples and destroyed the shrines of the Buddha. He also had the priests (*daoren* 道人) decapitated. These priests seem to have been the attendants of the Buddhist shrines.

monk Dharmakāla reached Luoyang, the capital of the Wei 魏 dynasty (220–265), he complained that

> the manners of the [Buddhist] religion were false and distorted. There were monks who had never been ordained (歸戒) and who only by their tonsure distinguished themselves from the profane; when performing the (ceremonies of) fasting and confession (of sins) they imitated the (non-Buddhist) sacrificial rites.[21]

Thus, there was a kind of Buddhist priest who acted much in the same way as other priests of the popular religion. It should be remarked that even the ceremonies of confession of sins (*chan* 懺) are said to have been performed in imitation of the popular religions. If this remark is not just a literary phrase, it must refer to rites of confession performed in popular sects as they are known from the sects of Zhang Jiao and Zhang Lu. This would suggest that already in this early phase popular Buddhism had come into contact with the Daoist sectarian traditions. Unfortunately, the available evidence is not sufficient to draw any further conclusions.

One of the reasons for the mean state of the Buddhist *saṃgha* in the early third century was the lack of Chinese translations of the *vinaya*, the monastic rules. This deficiency was remedied through the translation of several works made by Dharmakāla and Kang Sengkai 康僧鎧 in 250 and shortly afterwards.[22] In this way the foundation was laid for the development of a regular Chinese *saṃgha* that complied with the regulations of the Buddhist tradition. This does not mean, however, that after the translation of the *vinaya*-texts all monks followed these rules. There was a great variety of different types of monks. On the one side there were monks engaged in literary work, translating scriptures and writing commentaries. These scholar-monks had of course a profound education and conducted their studies usually in one of the major monasteries. Although translators and commentators figure prominently in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳) and make more than have of all biographies, they certainly were only a tiny minority among all monks. For the majority doctrinal matters were probably less important than the practical aspects of the Buddhist teachings. They specialized in the recitation of certain scriptures, which

[21] *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, by Huijiao 慧皎 (T 2059), in *Taishō*, vol. 50, pp. 324c-325a. Translation based on Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China*, p. 55.

[22] Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China*, pp. 55f.

was more a matter of ascetic discipline than of intellectual mastery, or concentrated on meditation. Many Buddhist ascetics lived as recluses in the mountains or wandered around working miracles to convert the population.[23] These were by no means debased forms of Buddhism, but an important and respected aspect of Buddhist practice. It would be a misunderstanding of Chinese Buddhism if it were reduced to the intellectual achievements of the scholar-monks and their influence upon the history of Chinese philosophy. Buddhism was above all a religious practice. The ritual recitation of sacred scriptures or of *dhāraṇīs* that contained the essence of certain scriptures were not only meritorious works, they also secured the divine help of buddhas and bodhisattvas, which was testified in countless reports of miracles.[24]

Not all Buddhist practitioners, however, restricted their activities to purely religious aims. When the number of monks increased during the fourth and fifth centuries to tens and hundreds of thousands, it was unavoidable that some of them used their position for selfish purposes.[25] Not only were the monks exempted from tax and corvée labour, they could also have considerable influence on the population, particularly if they succeeded in gaining a reputation for their magical or medical skills. This influence could be used to attract a following similar to the leaders of popular sects. Furthermore, these monks often did not follow the *vinaya*-rules and were hardly different from popular priests. We can gain an impression of these irregular monks from the *Mouzi lihuo lun*, a Buddhist apologetic writing that may have originated in the early fifth century.[26] There a fictitious critic is quoted reproaching the behaviour of monks:

> Nowadays the monks indulge in wine and liquors or they have wives and children. They buy cheap commodities and sell them as valuables; their

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[23] Biographies of some of these more ritually than intellectually oriented monks can be found in *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 9 to 13. For the role of "magician-monks" in the conversion of north China cf. Tsukamoto, *A history of early Chinese Buddhism,* pp. 280–283.

[24] For the role of *dhāraṇīs* cf. Maria Dorothea Reis-Habito, *Die Dhāraṇī des Großen Erbarmens des Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara mit tausend Händen und Augen. Übersetzung und Untersuchung ihrer textlichen Grundlagen sowie Erforschung ihres Kultes in China* (Monumenta Serica Monograph Series; 27), Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1993; ch. 4 contains translations of a number of reports on the miraculous effects of the *dhāraṇīs*.

[25] Some of the relevant sources are translated by Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China,* pp. 259 f.

[26] For the dating of the *Mouzi lihuo lun* cf. above note 8.

> main occupation is fraud and swindle. They are the greatest impostors of the time. This is probably what Buddhism means by 'non-activity' (*wuwei*)![27]

Not only did monks engage in barter and other worldly activities, they also used their skills to attract followers. The monk Daoheng 道恆 in his *Shi bo lun* 釋駁論 (*Treatise Removing Attacks*), which was written in the early fifth century, also quotes an imaginary opponent:

> [There are monks] who pretend to have medical skills and fabricate cold and hot [drugs], or they make their living by the clever use of strange and heterodox (*yiduan* 異端) crafts, or they practise fortune telling and divination to give empty advise on good or evil fate. With their deceitful ways (*gui dao* 詭道) and pretended powers they want to influence their contemporaries.[28]

These quotations may suffice to give an impression of how much some of the Buddhist clergy differed from the highly educated monks on the upper scale of the *saṃgha*. The sources say nothing about the clientele of these monks, but we can easily imagine that the people who sustained them had only a dim and distorted knowledge of the orthodox Buddhist teachings. They probably belonged to cultural milieus where it did not make a great difference whether a healer or fortune-teller called himself a Buddhist monk or a Daoist priest. On the other hand, even if this kind of Buddhism differed widely from the Buddhism of the elites, it contributed to the diffusion of Buddhist notions and symbols in the popular culture. There they merged with popular religious traditions, which in this way increasingly gained a Buddhist appearance. For the orthodox Buddhists it was crucial to separate from such irregular forms lest they be suspected of heterodoxy.

Rebellions led by monks during the fifth and early sixth centuries

The most severe tactic in arguing that a religion was heterodox was to point out its connection with rebellions. The Buddhists used this argument extensively against Daoism, pointing to the rebellions of Zhang Jiao, Sun En, and the many Li Hongs.[29] This was, as we have seen, one of the reasons for the Daoists' endeavour to eliminate these sects from orthodox Daoism. As orthodox Daoism emerged, it left, as it

[27] *Hong ming ji*, *j.* 1, p. 4a.

[28] *Hong ming ji*, *j.* 6, p. 35b.

[29] E.g. *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (T 2122), in *Taishō*, vol. 53, pp. 704c/705a, where even Zhang Ling is included in the list of Daoist rebels.

were, the popular sects and their rebellions behind. Buddhism, on the other hand, gradually diffused to the level of the popular sects, and it was almost unavoidable that some Buddhist-inspired popular movements became involved in political action. From the fifth century on, when eschatological and millenarian expectations were en vogue, the sources report a number of rebellions under the leadership of Buddhist monks. It is no question that the great majority of these monks belonged to the segments of the Buddhist community that have been depicted above. However, we can be equally sure that reported cases of rebellion represent only a small part of the popular religious movements led by monks.

The leader of the first reported Buddhist-inspired rebellion was not a monk but a layman from Anding 安定 in eastern Gansu by the name of Hou Ziguang 侯子光. According to the *History of the Jin Dynasty* he was an attractive boyish young man. In 337 he declared to be a Buddha Prince (*fo taizi* 佛太子) from the kingdom of Greater Qin (*Da Qin guo* 大秦國) coming to be king of the kingdom of Lesser Qin (*Xiao Qin guo* 小秦國). He then changed his name to Li Ziyang 李子楊 and went to Huxian 鄠縣 district (in Shaanxi) where he found many followers. They gathered several thousand men. Ziyang was declared the Great Yellow Emperor (*Da Huangdi* 大黃帝) and inaugurated a new era called Longxing 龍興 ("The Dragon Arises"). Several of his leading adherents were appointed as ministers and generals. After the rebellion was crushed down by the government forces and Ziyang decapitated, no blood flowed from his neck and more then ten days his face appeared as if he was still alive.[30]

As usual the usurpation of imperial titles was considered a major crime equivalent to open rebellion. Hou Ziguang's case is in several respects not typical for later Buddhist rebellions. First, he was not a monk but a layman whose allegiance to Buddhism seems to have been only superficial. Second, the religious symbols used drew freely from both the Buddhist and the Daoist traditions. He first called himself Prince Buddha but later changed his name to Li Ziyang, an obvious reference to the Daoist prophecies related to the Li family. The same Daoist influence is evident from the adopted title Yellow Emperor and the new era name. Thus, this case represents what could be called the embryonic state of popular Buddhist messianism or rather of the inclu-

[30] *Jinshu, j.* 106, p. 2767.

sion of Buddhist symbols into the popular sectarian tradition. However, the Buddhist influence cannot be denied.[31]

There is no other reported case of a rebellion connected with Buddhism in the fourth century. Apparently, Buddhist ideas were adopted only slowly within the popular sectarian milieu. The situation changes with the fifth century when for the first time monks[32] are mentioned as leaders of sects. Rebellions led by monks occurred in the North and in the South alike, but most are reported for the Northern Wei (386–534) dynasty.[33] The notorious persecution of Buddhism in 445 was based on accusations that monks in Chang'an had stored weapons to support a rebellion led by a certain Gai Wu 蓋吳.[34] Whether these accusations were justified or not, is difficult to say. In any case, they show that Buddhist monks had gained a reputation that made allegations of political conspiracy not altogether unbelievable. As early as in 402 a monk (*śramaṇa*) named Zhang Qiao 張翹 had been executed after he

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[31] It may be that Hou Ziguang's rebellion is the first reported case of a popular movement connected with the figure of *Yueguang tongzi* 月光童子 (Candraprabhakumāra: "Moonlight Boy", rendered by Zürcher as "Prince Moonlight"), who later played an important role in Buddhist eschatology. Although the references to *Yueguang tongzi* are not conclusive, they are nevertheless noteworthy. The *Shengri jing* 申日經 (T 535, in *Taishō*, vol. 14., p. 819b), a work reportedly translated during the Western Jin (265–316), contains a prophecy of the Buddha that thousand years after his *parinirvāṇa*, when the scriptures and the *dharma* are about to perish, *Yueguang tongzi* will appear in the kingdom of Qin 秦國 to be a sage lord (*shengjun* 聖君). He will receive the Buddhist scriptures and the *dharma* and convert many people in Qin and the bordering regions. It should be noted that Hou Ziguang declared to come from the kingdom of Greater Qin to be ruler in Lesser Qin, which obviously refers to China but is a strange designation pointing to a cryptic context. The prophecy about *Yueguang*'s appearance in Qin could provide a clue. Moreover, it was found worth recording that Hou Ziguang was a boyish young man, which makes sense if one assumes that he pretended to be the *Yueguang tongzi* ("Moonlight Boy"). *Yueguang tongzi* was obviously expected to appear as a boy or young man, as can be seen from a later case where a seven years old boy was said to be him (Cf. below p. 115). In the *Shenri jing* he is a sixteen years old young man.

[32] In most cases the sources speak of *shamen* 沙門 (*śramaṇa*), which is usually translated as "monk". However, *śramaṇa* can also be understood in a wider sense meaning "religious ascetic". In some cases these people are also called *daoren* 道人, which may indicate that their status as ordained monks was dubious.

[33] The rebellions of "Buddhist bandits" under the Northern Wei have been extensively treated by Tsukamoto Zenryū 塚本善隆, *Shina bukkyōshi kenkyū: Hokugi hen* 支那佛教史研究 北魏篇, Tokyo, 1942, pp. 241–291.

[34] *Weishu*, *j.* 114, pp. 3033 f. The report may have been a pretext to suppress Buddhism. The monks were said not only to have stored weapons, wine and treasures, but also to have had secret rooms where they practised debauchery with women from noble families.

had proclaimed himself "Highest King" (*wushang wang* 無上王) and gathered a following, supposedly to start a rebellion.[35]

During the last decades of the fifth century a number of rebellions is reported under the Northern Wei dynasty. In 473 the monk (*śramaṇa*) Huiyin 慧隱 started a rebellion and was decapitated.[36] Eight years later, in 481, the monk Faxiu 法秀 led a revolt in which more than hundred officials and many slaves were involved. Faxiu made use of prophecies and omens to incite his followers. Judging from the government reactions the rebellion must have been a serious political threat. Faxiu was tortured to death, and only the intervention of the empress prevented a general execution of monks (*daoren* 道人).[37] The next rebellion is reported for 490, when the monk Sima Huiyu 司馬惠御, who had adopted the title Saintly King (*shengwang* 聖王), assembled forces to attack the capital of Pingyuan commandery 平原郡. He was caught and decapitated.[38] Thus, within seventeen years three cases of armed rebellion led by monks (*śramaṇa*) are reported. This was probably the background of a memorial which Lu Yuan 盧淵 presented to emperor Xiaowendi (r. 471–499):

> Your slave has also heard, what is generally known, that among the common people in the eastern regions since many years there is a virtual competition in establishing vegetarian societies (*zhaihui* 齋會). [Their leaders] falsely claim to be nobles to agitate and delude [their followers]. Obviously, they use their position among the populace to arouse feelings against the ruling dynasty. Their ambitions are boundless and beyond compare. In my ignorant view it would be appropriate to punish them as soon as possible to stop these activities and to execute their leaders. Otherwise, I fear, they may become a disaster such as the Yellow Turbans and the Red Eyebrows. If we tolerate the small seedlings and do not cut them as soon as they appear or chop them with an axe when they have grown up, we may face a mass of criminals.[39]

Lu Yuan's memorial shows that the reported cases of rebellion were only the surface of a social stream that had developed in the eastern part of north China. It was a stream of popular religious associations that seem to have taken deep roots in the society. Since they were

[35] *Weishu, j.* 2, pp. 39 f.
[36] *Weishu, j.* 7A, p. 140.
[37] *Weishu, j.* 7A, p. 150; *j.* 114, p. 3045; *Nan Qishu, j.* 57, pp. 990 f.
[38] *Weishu, j.* 7B, p. 166.
[39] *Weishu, j.* 47, p. 1048.

called "vegetarian societies" we may surmise that they were Buddhist in orientation. Their leaders were probably monks or people who posed as Buddhist monks. However, the Buddhist character of these associations should not be overstressed. There were also Daoist-oriented groups that had adopted vegetarianism and shared many traits with the popular Buddhist associations. A good example is the sect associated with the *Dongyuan shenzhou jing* that flourished in the fifth century. There, "vegetarian halls" (*zhaitang* 齋堂) were established[40] and eschatological beliefs were in the centre of the sect's creed. As we shall see, this is very similar to some Buddhist groups. The more we come down to the level of popular religious milieus the less clear cut are distinctions between Buddhist or Daoist sects. However, by the fifth century the social influence of Buddhism had become so dominant that the popular sects increasingly adopted Buddhist terminology and practices. Their leaders presumably came from the large reservoir of often marginalized monks, or at least pretended to be monks.

One of those sect leaders whose bonds with Buddhism were only superficial seems to have been Sima Bainian 司馬百年. Although he apparently was a monk (*śramaṇa*), he called himself Sima "Hundred Years", a name which is more suitable for a Daoist sect leader such as Li "Eight Hundred" (Li Babai)[41] than for a Buddhist monk. Under the Southern Song dynasty (420–502) he rallied followers and accepted the title "Peace Establishing King" (*anding wang* 安定王).[42] In the year 451 he joint the rebellion of Sima Shunze 司馬順則, who had invaded Sichuan.[43] This is not the only reported case of "Buddhist rebels" in the South. A few years later, in 458, Tanbiao 曇標, a religious practitioner (*daoren* 道人, lit. "man of the way"), planned a rebellion. In its aftermath, an imperial edict was promulgated reproaching the depraved state of the *saṃgha* and demanding strict compliance with the monastic rules. Offenders should be severely punished.[44] We may conclude, therefore, that Tanbiao was a Buddhist monk or at least pretended to be one. Thus, the situation in the South does not seem to have differed much from the North, even if the number of reported cases of rebellions led by monks is significantly higher in the northern regions, particularly

[40] Cf. Mollier, *Une apocalypse taoïste du Ve siècle*, p. 73.

[41] See above pp. 72 ff.

[42] Anding is also a place name. Hence the title could mean "King of Anding".

[43] *Zizhi tongjian*, *j.* 126, p. 3969.

[44] *Songshu*, *j.* 97, pp. 2386 f.

the Northeast. Between 509 and 515, the Northern Wei dynasty experienced four rebellions that were led by monks, more than one every two years.[45] The most violent of them was the uprising of the monk Faqing 法慶 in 515.

The rebellion of the monk Faqing (515)

The events which developed into the greatest sect uprising after the rebellion of Sun En in 399 are reported in the *History of the Wei Dynasty:*

> At that time the *śramaṇa* Faqing 法慶 from Jizhou 冀州 started to propagate strange and illusive things. He attracted Li Guibo 李歸伯 from Bohai 勃海 who followed him with his whole family and furthermore brought the people from his home region. Thus, [Li Guibo] supported Faqing as leader. Faqing [in return] declared Guibo to be a bodhisattva of the tenth stage (*shizhu pusa* 十住菩薩), appointed him as "Demon Pacifying General" (*pingmo junsi* 平魔軍司) and "King who Establishes the Han" (*dinghan wang* 定漢王). Himself he called *Dacheng*[46] 大乘 (Great Vehicle, Mahāyāna).
>
> [Faqing taught his followers] that one who has killed one man will be a bodhisattva of the first stage, while killing ten men will make him a bodhisattva of the tenth stage. He also mixed narcotic drugs and ordered his followers to take them. [As a result the minds of his followers became disturbed such that] fathers, sons, and brothers did not recognize each other and had nothing in mind but killing. Thus, his crowd killed the magistrate of Fucheng 阜城, devastated the district of Bohai and killed the officials. When the regional inspector Xiao Baoyin 蕭寶夤 and the administrator Cui Bolin 崔伯驎 made a punitive expedition and arrived on the scene, they were defeated at Zhuzao 煮棗城 where [Cui] Bolin fell in the battle. Thereupon the evil hordes became even stronger. Everywhere they slaughtered and destroyed monasteries and cloisters. They butchered the monks and nuns, and burned the sacred scriptures and images declaring: 'The new Buddha has appeared who will eradicate the old demons.'
>
> To subdue this rebellion [Yuan] Yao [元]遙 was given full powers as commander of the northern expedition. He led an army of hundred

[45] In 509 the *śramaṇa* Liu Huiwang 劉慧汪 gathered the masses and rebelled (*Weishu, j.* 8, p. 207). The next year, in 510, the *śramaṇa* Liu Guangxiu 劉光秀 planned a rebellion and was executed (*Weishu, j.* 8, p. 209). In 514 the *śramaṇa* Liu Sengshao 劉僧紹 gathered followers and rebelled. He called himself "Luminous Dharma King of the State of Quiet Dwelling" (*Jingjuguo ming fawang* 淨居國明法王) (*Weishu, j.* 8, p. 215; *j.* 105 A, p. 2340).

[46] Lit. "Great Vehicle", i.e. Mahāyāna. Also pronounced *Dasheng.*

> thousand men infantry and cavalry. Faqing attacked the forces of Yao, but Yao smashed him. Then Yao charged general Zhang Qiu 張虯 and others to pursue him with the cavalry and to destroy the rebels. They caught Faqing and his wife, the nun Huihui 惠暉, and others and decapitated them. Their heads were sent to the capital. Later Guibo was equally caught and killed in the capital.[47]

These events took place between the sixth month of 515, when the rebellion started, and the ninth month of the same year, when Faqing's head was sent to the capital.[48] After that the rebel forces dispersed. Two years later, in 517, the remnants of the sect united again and attacked the district town of Yingzhou 瀛州. Yet they were finally defeated.[49]

Faqing's revolt is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, of course, is the magnitude of the movement, which forced the government to mobilize a formidable army of a hundred thousand men to subdue it. According to the *History of the Northern Qi Dynasty*, Faqing's followers amounted to fifty thousand.[50] Even if this number is small in comparison with the Yellow Turbans' rebellion, it still is more than a single religious teacher could gather within two or three years out of nothing. One explanation for Faqing's success is provided by the sources: Faqing was accepted as teacher by Li Guibo "who followed him with his whole family and furthermore brought the people from his home region." Now, this Li Guibo belonged to a leading clan of Bohai in present-day Hebei province.[51] As an influential member of the local gentry he was in a position to command a considerable number of dependants and relatives who joined Faqing's movement. This may partially explain the great number of followers; it does not explain, however, their religious zeal and fanaticism. Even if we cannot rule out the possibility that Li Guibo and Faqing had political aims, their principal motivation and ideology was religious.

The slogan "The new Buddha has appeared who will eradicate the old demons" without doubt refers to the Buddha Maitreya. The *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄 (*Catalogue of Buddhist sūtras*), which was compiled by

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[47] *Weishu*, *j.* 19 A, pp. 445 f.

[48] *Weishu*, *j.* 9, p. 223.

[49] *Weishu*, *j.* 9, p. 225.

[50] *Bei Qishu* 北齊書, by Li Boyao 李百藥, vols. 1–2, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1972 (1983), *j.* 21, p. 301.

[51] Cf. *Weishu*, *j.* 72, 1617.

Fajing 法經 and his collaborators during the Sui dynasty, lists among the faked scriptures a *Mile chengfo fumo jing* 彌勒成佛扶魔經 (*Sūtra on Maitreya who Becomes [the new] Buddha and Subdues the Demons*).[52] Although the text itself is now lost, its title matches perfectly Faqing's slogan.[53] Obviously, the sect's teachings were no invention of Faqing but belonged to a tradition of popular Buddhism where the Buddha Maitreya was expected to appear in the near future. One of the tasks of the new Buddha was to destroy the demons, which in Faqing's understanding were identified with the political and clerical establishment and the enemies of the sect. Killing these demons was thus interpreted as a religious merit that secured promotion on the ladder of bodhisattva-hood.[54] It is noteworthy that among the principal targets of the rebels were regular monks and nuns. This calls to mind a passage in the *Foshuo fa miejin jing* 佛説法滅盡經 (*Sūtra on the Extinction of the Dharma*), where the Buddha explains that at the time of the impending extinction of the Dharma devils would become monks to ruin the Buddhist teachings.[55] The time of decline would thus be marked by the corruption of the *saṃgha*. Similar, if less radical, ideas that devaluated the position of ordinary monks are expressed in some apocryphal scriptures: In the *Zhengming jing* 證明經 (*Sūtra on the Realization of Understanding*) monks hold only the eighth and last position of the "eight kinds of men."[56] The same *sūtra* explains that Maitreya after his appearance in the

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[52] *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄, by Fajing 法經 (T 2146), in *Taishō*, vol. 55, *j.* 2, p. 126c; *Zhongjing mulu* 眾經目錄, by Chancong 產琮 (T 2147), in *Taishō*, vol. 55, *j.* 4, p. 173b.

[53] The theme is not completely unknown in orthodox scriptures. In the *Foshuo Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* 彌勒下生成佛經, translated by Kumārajīva (*Taishō*, vol. 14, p. 425b), we read "At that time [i.e., when Maitreya has appeared and converted humanity] the *devas* and *rākṣasas* see that the Buddha subdued the powerful demons." However, there the theme is not further elaborated as seems to be the case in the *Mile chengfo fumo jing*.

[54] The titles "Bodhisattva of the tenth stage" (*shizhu pusa*) and "Bodhisattva of the first stage" (*yizhu pusa*) refer to the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*, of which several translations exist in Chinese. For the first translation by Dharmarakṣa cf. Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China*, pp. 196 f.

[55] *Foshuo Fa miejin jing* 佛説法滅盡經 (T 396), in *Taishō*, vol. 12, p. 218c. The scripture is listed in the *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 (T 2145) (*Taishō*, vol. 55, pp. 28c) i.e., it existed before 515. It is not considered an apocryphal scripture. However its content is quite similar to the *Foshuo Xiao fa miejin jing* 佛説小法滅盡經 (T 2874, vol. 85, pp. 1358 f) which is listed among the dubious scriptures in the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, by Zhisheng 智昇 (T 2145), in *Taishō*, vol. 55, p. 673a.

[56] On the position of monks in the *Zhengming jing* see below pp. 141 f.

world "will cure and eliminate all filth and foulness." Those who disregard and damage the true *dharma* will be punished by the heavenly powers.[57]

Although there is no information about the scriptures used by Faqing, it is clear that he belonged to a religious milieu where ideas akin to those expressed in these *sūtras* were popular. The outbreak of the Dacheng rebellion was thus the most radical manifestation of a religious subcurrent of heterodox Buddhist groups that regarded the present world including the clerical establishment as dominated by evil forces. They believed that these would be exterminated with the advent of the new Buddha Maitreya who would inaugurate a new period of the true *dharma*. We shall treat these ideas in more detail below. Suffice it to note here that Faqing's Dacheng sect was no isolated event but belonged to the underground stream of heterodox Buddhist sectarianism. It was a tradition with its own scriptures, most of which have been excluded from the canon since they were regarded as forgeries by the orthodox compilers of catalogues. Such apocryphal *sūtras*, however, must have been widespread, since a number of them has been preserved among the scriptures found in Dunhuang. There were groups of believers where these scriptures were held in high esteem and thus transmitted in spite of their official condemnation. We do not know much about such sectarian groups since historiographers usually did not regard them as worth mentioning, unless they happened to be involved in rebellions. The greater part of this Buddhist sectarianism remained hidden below the surface of official historiography. Nevertheless, it is possible to detect this underground tradition from the scattered pieces that have been reported in the sixth and seventh centuries.

In the same region of Jizhou in present-day Hebei province where the Dacheng rebellion broke out in 515, two years later remnants of the same sect revolted again. And a further case of Buddhist heterodoxy is reported a few years later during the era Xiping 熙平 (516–527). A number of "heretical criminals" (*yaozei* 妖賊) were caught who had escaped and after an amnesty failed to surrender within the set time. Since they had not surrendered, the law demanded that they be punished

[57] *Puxian pusa shuo zhengming jing* 普賢菩薩説證明經 (T 2879), in *Taishō*, vol. 85, p. 1365c. Cf. Antonino Forte, *Political propaganda and ideology in China at the end of the seventh century: Inquiry into the nature, authors and functions of the Tunhuang document S 6502 followed by an annotated translation*, Napoli: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1976, pp. 160 f.

according to their original crime, which meant decapitation and suspending of their heads. Although the text does not give details, it appears that their crime was participation in the Dacheng rebellion, which would explain the harsh punishment. To the group belonged a seven years old boy whom they called Moonlight Boy Liu Jinghui (*Yueguang tongzi* Liu Jinghui 月光童子劉景暉). He was said to be able to change his form into a snake or a pheasant. The boy was spared from execution because of his age and since he was more a victim in the machinations of these sectarians than a criminal.[58]

For our present context it is important that the boy was called Moonlight Boy, or Prince Moonlight (*Yueguang tongzi*). This refers to the figure of *Candraprabha-kumāra*. In orthodox Buddhist literature Prince Moonlight plays only a minor role but in some circles attained the status of a bodhisattva appearing after the decline of the *dharma* to restore the true teaching.[59] He is mentioned in the *Sūtra on the Extinction of the Dharma* (*Fa miejin jing*), which—as has been noted—describes the moral decline of the world and above all of the Buddhist clergy. After a final catastrophe that destroys most of the sinners, *Yueguang* will appear and renew the *dharma*. This restoration will, however, last only for the short period of fifty-two years. Then, the Buddhist teaching will finally disappear from the world.[60]

The *Zhongjing mulu* (*Catalogue of Buddhist Sūtras*) of 594, in the list of faked or apocryphal scriptures, catalogues at least five *sūtras* that contain references to *Yueguang*.[61] This shows that belief in this bodhisattva of the final period of the *dharma* was popular in the sixth century. Its popularity is also attested in other scriptures: An apocryphal passage in the *Dehu zhangzhe jing* 德護長者經 mentions *Yueguang* as powerful king in the country of Great Sui (*Da Sui guo* 大隋國).[62] According to

[58] *Weishu*, *j.* 111, pp. 2884 f; *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜, by Wang Qinruo 王欽若, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960 (photoreprint of the 1642 edition), *j.* 615, p. 7395b.

[59] For an extensive treatment of this figure cf. Erik Zürcher, " 'Prince Moonlight', Messianism and eschatology in early medieval Chinese Buddhism," *T'oung Pao*, 68 (1982), pp. 1–75.

[60] *Foshuo Fa miejin jing* (T 396), p. 1119a/b. Cf. Erik Zürcher, "Eschatology and messianism in early Chinese Buddhism," in *Leyden studies in sinology*, edited by W. L. Idema, Leiden, 1981, pp. 34–56: 49 f.

[61] *Zhongjing mulu* (T 2146), pp. 126c/127a. The scriptures in question are: *Puxian pusa shuo ci zhengming jing* 普賢菩薩説此證明經, *Shouluo biqiu jian Yueguang tongzi jing* 首羅比丘見月光童子經, *Guan Yueguang pusa ji jing* 觀月光普薩記經, *Foshuo Fa miejin jing* 佛説法滅盡經 and *Bo ji jing* 鉢記經.

[62] *Dehu zhangzhe jing* 德護長者經, in *Taishō*, vol. 14, p. 849b/c.

Zürcher this is a piece of propaganda on behalf of the Sui emperor Wendi 文帝 (r. 589–617).[63] This implies that the belief in *Yueguang*, to which the passage refers, must have been generally known at least in Buddhist circles.

This all suggests that the child Liu Jinghui, who was called *Yueguang tongzi*, was declared to be a manifestation of this bodhisattva of the final age. The sect leaders "deluded the masses through heretical talks," which in view of what we know from the apocryphal scriptures may have been the propagation of apocalyptic beliefs denouncing the present time as an age of moral decay and corruption destined to imminent destruction. Thus, the basic ideas of this sect were probably very similar to Faqing's. This does not mean, however, that the *Yueguang* sect was equally fanatic and militant. Yet in any case its teachings were considered dangerous enough to demand capital punishment.

The last reported case of a Buddhist inspired rebellion in the sixth century happened in 524 in the region of Wuchengjun 五城郡 in eastern Shaanxi. There, two sect leaders who belonged to the "barbarians of the mountains" attracted many followers through heretical teachings and finally rebelled adopting imperial titles. As Tang Changru has shown, the aborigines of this region had been converted to Buddhism since long, and there is good reason to suppose that these heretical teachings had something to do with the expectation of Maitreya.[64] For the sectarians wore white clothes and used white umbrellas and banners.[65] As we shall see below, the use of the colour white was a characteristic of many Maitreya sects. This seems to be the first attested case of this practice.

Buddhist sectarianism during the Sui and early Tang

The sources are silent about Buddhist rebels in the second half of the sixth century. However, during the turmoil of the last years of the Sui dynasty (581–618) and the first years of the Tang dynasty (618–907) several serious incidents occurred that attracted the attention of histori-

[63] Zürcher, "Prince Moonlight," p. 26.

[64] Tang Changru 唐長儒, "Beichao de Mile xinyang ji qi shuailuo 北朝的彌勒信仰及其衰落," in *Wei Jin Nanbeichao shi lun shiyi* 魏晉南北朝史論拾遺, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983, pp. 196–207: 200 f.

[65] *Weishu, j.* 69, p. 1531.

ographers. One remarkable case is the attempt of a group of sectarians to start a rebellion right in the imperial capital:

> On the first day of the first month of the sixth year [of the era Daye 大業, 610 CE) when it was new moon, in the early morning ten criminals who wore plain [i.e., white] caps and garments of white silk entered [the city] from the Jianguo gate 建國門. They were burning incense and holding flowers and called themselves [devotees of the] Buddha Maitreya. The guards of the gate all bowed their heads [to salute them]. All of a sudden they seized the guards' weapons and started a revolt. Jian 暕, the prince of Qi, engaged and decapitated them. Thereafter there was an extensive search [for people involved in this plot] throughout the capital. More than thousand families were found to be connected and punished.[66]

Although this rebellion was stifled before it really began, the incident provides some revealing bits of information. The sect to which these people belonged stood in the tradition of popular Maitreyism. The sectarians were not only devotees of Maitreya, as our source states, but they believed in the approaching advent of this buddha, if they did not even believe that Maitreya had already appeared on earth. Their slogan *Mile chushi* 彌勒出世, which is attested in another source,[67] can be understood in the perfect as well as in the future tense: "Maitreya has appeared" or "Maitreya will appear". Surprisingly, the rebels did not conceal their devotion to Maitreya when they tried to enter the city, but posed as sincere devotees holding incense and flowers to pay homage to Maitreya. Correctly they anticipated that the guards would pay respect to such religious dedication. We can conclude that devotion to Maitreya was nothing unusual in the capital and—what is more—that it was a respected form of Buddhist practice. This accords with the information that afterwards more than thousand families were detected as being involved in the attempted rebellion. Although this was only a small percentage of the total population of the capital, it still is quite a significant number taking into account that to each family belonged several individuals. Since police control in the capital was more severe than in the provinces, the religious activities of so many people cannot have remained unnoticed, which again shows that devotion to Maitreya was neither uncommon nor suspicious. The would-be rebels certainly expected their co-sectarians in the city to join their forces after they

[66] *Suishu* 隋書, by Wei Zheng 魏徵, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973 (1982), *j.* 3, p. 74.

[67] *Suishu*, *j.* 23, p. 662.

started the fighting. That their attempt was foiled before the plans could be realized shows that their religious zeal was much greater than their strategic skills. However, there cannot be any doubt that their religious commitment had induced them to direct political action. For the only possible target of an armed rebellion in the capital was deposing the emperor, if we exclude the possibility of voluntary martyrdom or suicide. Unfortunately the sources do not report any of the confessions made by arrested sectarians, so that we have no direct information about the religious beliefs on which the political aims were based. It was certainly no coincidence that the action was started on the very first day of the year, but the exact meaning of this date is not clear. Possibly the new year was thought to be the first year of a new era under the rule of Maitreya, which meant that the rule of the demonic forces of the former age had to be exterminated.[68] The attempted overthrow of the dynasty was possibly based on religious assumptions quite similar to those of Faqing nearly a century before.

Whereas most reported rebellions in earlier centuries started in the provinces and attacked the central government only indirectly, the attempted revolt of 610 aimed right at the centre of the existing political and social order. Surprisingly enough, this attack on the emperor was no isolated event but has a parallel in another incident only three years later.

> In the ninth year [of the era Daye, 613 CE] the emperor was in Gaoyang 高陽. Song Zixian 宋子賢, a man from Tangxian 唐縣, was skilled in magical arts. Every night there was a luminous light on top of [his ?] building that he could transform into the shape of a buddha. He declared that Maitreya had appeared [on earth]. Furthermore he suspended a big mirror from [the wall of] the main room [of this building] and on white paper he had painted the images of snakes, quadrupeds, and humans. When someone paid him a visit and turned to the mirror, he could see his own living image. Or he saw the reflection of the snake painted on the paper. Zixian then immediately explained: 'This is [the result of your] bad *karma*. You must change and pay homage [to the Buddha] reciting his name.' He also instructed [other] visitors to turn so that a human image became visible [indicating good karma].

[68] It may, of course, also be that the day was chosen because during the new year festival crowds of residents and visitors were on the streets of the capital, which made surveillance more difficult. Furthermore, the rebels could be sure that the emperor was in the city.

> From far and near misled believers came to him, several hundred or thousand people a day. Thereupon he secretly planned a rebellion. He wanted to use a *Pañcapariṣad* assembly to rise arms and to assault the [imperial] carriage. The scheme was revealed and the commander of the Soaring Hawk Garrison led soldiers to arrest him. They arrived during the night at Song Zixian's dwelling and surrounded his house. However, since they saw a fire hole, the soldiers did not dare to enter. The commander said: 'This place never had a fire hole, it is nothing but magical illusion.' He then entered and there was no more fire. Thereafter Song Zixian was captured and decapitated. Together with him, his accomplices were punished numbering more than thousand families.[69]

Although these events did not happen in the capital but in present-day Hebei province, where the emperor was on an inspection tour, it was a direct attack on the centre of the state. Again, reference to the coming of Maitreya is obvious. As in the case of 610 more than thousand families were found to have been directly involved in the plot and were punished. The number of adherents, however, was considerably larger. It may be that Li Songxian expected many of the Buddhist believers who would assemble for the great *Pañcapariṣad* festival (*wuzhe fohui* 無遮佛會)[70] to join him when he attacked the imperial entourage. It should be noted, however, that Song Zixian was not a monk but a magician. Even if he made ample use of Buddhist notions and symbols, his practices remind more of the *fangshi* of old than of Buddhism. His followers seem to have been more attracted by his magical skills than by devotion to Buddhism. They probably did not care much about this difference. Buddhism had diffused in popular culture to a degree that its influence could be felt in virtually any religious context. It is noteworthy that even in circles where Buddhist beliefs seem to have been not more than a symbolic facade, the coming of the new Buddha Maitreya was a common theme. Expectation of Maitreya had become part of diffused Buddhism permeating all levels of the society. From the seventh century on, therefore, reference to Maitreya does not necessarily imply that the sect in question can be defined as "Buddhist", just like reference to Laozi alone does not justify calling a sect "Daoist".

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[69] *Suishu*, *j.* 23, pp. 662 f.

[70] The *pañcapariṣad* or *pañcavārṣikapariṣad* is a great Buddhist ceremony that was held every five years. According to tradition it was founded by Aśoka. It was introduced in China by emperor Wudi of the Liang dynasty in 529. Cf. Sylvain Lévi and Édouard Chavannes, "Les seize arhat protecteurs de la Loi," *Journal Asiatique*, 8 (1916), pp. 5–50, 189–304: p. 42, note 41. I am indebted for this reference to Thomas Jansen.

The figure of Maitreya as the herald of a new era had been absorbed by the popular religious culture.

In the twelfth month of the same year in which Song Zixian attempted his revolt, another Maitreya sect was detected by the authorities in Fufeng 扶風 (in present-day Shaanxi), about one hundred miles west of the capital. There

> a *śramaṇa* named Xiang Haiming 向海明 proclaimed that the Buddha Maitreya had appeared, and secretly planned a rebellion. People who believed in him all had auspicious dreams. Therefore they were deluded by him. [Even] members of the upper class (*shi* 士) in Sanfu 三輔 (the regions around the capital) willingly called him "Great Saint" (*dasheng* 大聖). The masses who followed him in taking the arms of rebellion were several ten thousand. An imperial army attacked and defeated them.[71]

Before they were defeated, the rebels had invaded the districts of Fufeng and Anding 安定.[72] This means that the armed revolt had some initial success. It should be noted that among his followers were many who belonged to the educated class. Also in this case, the object of the rebellion was to overthrow the ruling dynasty, for Xiang Haiming assumed the title of emperor (*huangdi* 皇帝) and declared the beginning of the new era Baiwu 白烏 ("White Crow" or "White Sun").[73]

A very similar case happened five years later in 618, the year when the Tang dynasty was founded.

> A *śramaṇa* from Huairong 懷戎 (about fifty miles northwest of present-day Peking) by the name of Gao Tancheng 高曇晟 [was involved in the following events]: Since the county magistrate had organized a vegetarian feast there was a great gathering of scholars and common people. Tancheng and five thousand monks (*seng* 僧) surrounded the crowd participating in the vegetarian feast and rebelled. They killed the magistrate and the commander of the garrison.
>
> [Gao Tancheng] called himself *Dacheng* Emperor (*dacheng huangdi* 大乘皇帝 [Mahāyāna or Great Vehicle Emperor]). He established the nun

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[71] *Suishu, j.* 23, p. 663.

[72] *Suishu, j.* 63, p. 1500. The name of the leader is in this source given as Xiang Haigong 向海公.

[73] *Suishu, j.* 4, p. 86. It is tempting to interpret the era name *Baiwu* (lit. "White Crow") as "White Sun" because this would be an equivalent of *baiyang* 白陽, which in later sectarian history is the common designation for the future age. *Wu* ("crow") in Chinese mythology means the crow living in the sun and thus can be used as a designation for the sun.

> Jingxuan 靜宣 as empress Xieshu 邪輸 (Defeat of Heterodoxy ?) and founded the new era Falun 法輪 (Wheel of the Dharma). He sent envoys to summon [Gao] Kaidao [高]開道 whom he appointed king of Qi. Kaidao led an army of five thousand men and followed him.[74]

As in the previous case, the rebel leader was a monk who assumed the title of emperor and inaugurated a new era. The events have to be seen in the context of the general turmoil accompanying the collapse of the Sui dynasty. Gao Kaidao, who joined Gao Tancheng's rebellion, was one of the warlords of the time. In his case, political ambition and religious ideas probably went hand in hand, but there is strong evidence that Gao Tancheng was inspired mainly by religious motives. There are striking parallels to Faqing's rebellion of 515. Most conspicuous is of course the name that Gao Tancheng accepted as emperor: *Dacheng* (Great Vehicle, Mahāyāna), the same that had been used by Faqing. Furthermore, the revolt started on the occasion of a great vegetarian feast organized by a local magistrate. Since this without doubt was a Buddhist festival, the monks' attack on the participants can be seen as an attack on the prevailing form of Buddhism. There is also the amazing parallel that both Gao Tancheng and Faqing had taken Buddhist nuns as wives. This shows that not only the leaders of these sects were monks but also many of their members. In the case of Gao Tanchang it is explicitly stated that he started his rebellion with a force of five thousand monks, which is an extraordinary number.

Thus, in the early seventh century there must have been a significant group of Buddhist monks and nuns who were in opposition to the established forms of Buddhism and its clergy. They seem to have been religious zealots who wanted another form of Buddhism than the one dominated by the clerical establishment and intimately connected with the temporal power. By abandoning celibacy they separated from the regular monks and fraternised with the lay believers. They envisioned a new form of Buddhism where monks were deprived of their privileged position and the role of laypeople elevated instead. These sectarian Buddhist groups were heavily influenced by the popular expectation of Maitreya. It must have been a very intense expectation, for they repeatedly attempted to dispose of the present rule. Evidently, they aimed at bringing to an end the present age of evil forces and to inaugurate the new age ruled by the Buddha Maitreya.

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[74] *Zizhi tongjian, j.* 186, pp. 5833f.

There are several other rebellions and incidents connected in some way with monks or Buddhism in the seventh century. I shall refer to some of them in other contexts.[75] After the seventh century, reports of religious rebellions are less frequent. It is difficult to interpret this change, which seems to indicate a decline of sectarian militancy. One has to keep in mind, however, that militant actions of religious sects were exceptional cases demanding an explanation rather than the other way around. The high frequency of violent actions in the early seventh century is a remarkable phenomenon deserving further research on its social and religious conditions. Unfortunately, historiographers usually saw no reason to report of religious groups unless they were involved in some kind of political activity. One such case is an incident occurring around 713:

> During the first years of the era Kaiyuan 開元 (713–741) Wang Huaigu 王懷古 preached the people: '[The age of the] Buddha Śākyamuni has reached its end and a new buddha will appear. The house of Li 李 will come to its end and the house of Liu 劉 will rise. This year black snow will fall everywhere and at the same time in Beizhou 貝州 the Silver City will appear.' The emperor ordered the surveillance commissioners of all provinces to arrest and execute him.[76]

The incident reveals that belief in the coming of the new buddha, who certainly was thought to be Maitreya, was still alive in the eighth century, although nothing is said about active rebellion. That the emperor reacted in such a harsh way is without doubt due to the fact that Wang Huaigu predicted the fall of the ruling dynasty of the house of Li. It should be noted that Wang made use of an old prophetic tradition about the Liu's family resumption of power. It is a tradition that in various forms can be traced back to the prophecies of Han dynasty. As can be seen from this case, there was a subcurrent of popular prophetic traditions that were transmitted throughout the centuries. This gives us an idea how long-lived other popular religious traditions may have

[75] In 621 an heretical monk named Zhijue 志覺 was involved in a rebellion of Li Zhongwen 李仲文 (*Zizhi tongjian, j.* 188, p. 5904). In 681 a woman riding a white horse and wearing white clothes stormed the astrological service in the capital with about ninety of her followers (*Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書, by Liu Xu 劉昫, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975 *j.* 36, p. 1320). In 683 a certain Bai Tieyu 白鐵余, who belonged to the non-Han population, pretended to have found a wonder-working buddha statue, gathered followers and rebelled (*Zizhi tongjian, j.* 203, pp. 6413 f).

[76] *Cefu yuangui* 冊府元龜, *j.* 922, p. 10889c.

been, even if the sources are silent about them for decades or even centuries.

Thus, although in the eighth and ninth centuries there are few reports on sects believing in the advent of Maitreya, we can be sure that this tradition, which is so evident in the sixth and seventh centuries, continued through the Tang dynasty. Besides the case of Wang Huaigu in 713 there is another manifestation of this tradition in the late ninth century. In 880 a heretic (*yaoren* 妖人) in Qingcheng 青城縣 (near Chengdu) founded a Maitreya society (*Mile hui* 彌勒會) and took preparations for a rebellion.[77] The expectation of Maitreya as the future buddha was also the religious background of the rebellion of Wang Ze 王則 in 1047, which started in Beizhou, the same region where Wang Huaigu was active.[78] From the late Yuan dynasty on, reports on Maitreya sects are again more frequent and richly documented in the Ming and Qing dynasties until the present time. It seems justified to suppose, therefore, that this tradition, which dates back at least to the fifth century, has an unbroken history of fifteen hundred years and was thus an essential part of the Chinese religious life, even if in some periods it remained unnoticed by historiographers.

3. Eschatological Beliefs in Buddhist Sectarianism

Since historiographers were primarily interested in the political aspects of religious movements they do not tell us much about the beliefs of the sectarian groups they mention, let alone of groups not involved in political activities. Only a few points can be gathered from the sources. The ideological background of most rebellions connected with Buddhism were eschatological beliefs. They expected the end of the present era and the beginning of a new time. The new time was believed to be ushered in by the advent of a new buddha who mostly is identified as Maitreya.

In this section I will consider these eschatological ideas more closely. We shall see that belief in the future Buddha Maitreya was not confined to heterodox sects, but belonged to the canonical tradition of orthodox Buddhism. After the fourth century, however, this orthodox belief,

[77] *Taiping guangji*, *j.* 289, p. 2302. Cf. Tang Changru, "Beichao de Mile xinyang ji qi shuailuo," p. 205.

[78] Cf. below p. 193.

which had no eschatological meaning, was in some milieus reinterpreted against the background of prevailing millenarian ideas. Belief in Maitreya was thus transformed and became the core element of popular Buddhist eschatology.

Maitreya in orthodox Buddhism

The tradition of Maitreya as the future Buddha, which became a central feature of Buddhist eschatology only in China, goes back to Indian sources. Jan Nattier, who has presented two thorough studies of the early history of the Maitreya myth,[79] has traced it to the Pāli canon. In the *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda-suttanta* (*Sūtra on the Lion's Roar of the Wheel-Turning King*), which appears twice in the Chinese Buddhist canon,[80] Maitreya is presented in a mythological scenario that describes a historical cycle from the time of one *cakravartin* ("wheel-turning king," that is, a Buddhist World Ruler) to the next: The beginning of a cosmic cycle is marked by the rule of a *cakravartin*, which lasts for thousands of years and represents the ideal state of the world. After the *cakravartin* has handed over the rule to his son to become a mendicant, this ideal state gradually declines because the successors give up their reliance on the *dharma*. The span of life of humans sinks from eighty thousand years to forty thousand and after countless successions is reduced to only ten years. Then the cycle changes. Human beings start again to follow the moral precepts of the *dharma* and their life span increases until again it reaches its maximum of eighty thousand years.[81] At this time, when the surface of the earth will be even and without obstacles, the harvests are plentiful and eighty thousand great cities provide a life free of sorrow and full of bless, a new buddha will appear. His name is Maitreya *tathāgata*. He will be in all regards similar

[79] Jan Nattier, "The meanings of the Maitreya myth: A typological analysis," in *Maitreya, the Future Buddha*, edited by Alan Sponberg and Helen Hardacre, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 23–47; Jan Nattier, *Once upon a future time. Studies in a Buddhist prophecy of decline* (Nanzan Studies in Asian Religions; 1), Berkeley: Asia Humanities Press, 1991.

[80] *Zhuanlun shengwang xiuxing jing* 轉輪聖王修行經, which is contained in the *Chang ahan jing* 長阿含經 (T 1), in *Taishō*, vol. 1, pp. 39a-42b and *Zhuanlun wang jing* 轉輪王經, contained in the *Zhong ahan jing* 中阿含經 (T 26), in *Taishō*, vol. 1, pp. 520b-525a. Both scriptures were translated into Chinese around the year 400 (cf. Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest*, p. 211).

[81] Cf. Nattier, *Once upon a future time*, pp. 13–15, where also more about the non-Chinese versions is said (note 7).

to the Buddha Śākyamuni. In this situation a new *cakravartin* rises who rules the world according to the Dharma. It is again a time full of prosperity and morality. Eventually, he becomes a monk himself, which opens the beginning of a new cosmic cycle.[82]

The *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda-suttanta*, which belongs to the Hīnayāna tradition, was translated into Chinese around the end of the fourth century. We note that in this tradition Maitreya has nothing to do with any messianic or otherwise eschatological expectations. His appearance is prophesied for a time after millions of years, which could hardly inspire the hope for an imminent advent of this golden age. If we turn to other canonical texts dealing with Maitreya,[83] the result is the same. Although the story of Maitreya is more fully elaborated describing his glorious existence in the Tuṣita heaven where he will remain for many millions of years until the time of his appearance has come, he is never said to be expected in the near future as a saviour of the present generation. However, some motifs found in canonical scriptures appear much later in sectarian writings. They show that these orthodox scriptures had some influence on the formation of heterodox forms of Maitreya belief.

Two points should be mentioned in this context. The first concerns the paradise-like conditions that would prevail when Maitreya appeared in the world. It was to be a world free of all distresses that normally make human life arduous and burdensome. The hindrances of the physical environment would have disappeared, there would be an abundance of the most delicious food and the relations between humans will be harmonious. In that time, when men would live for eighty-four thousand years and a virtuous *cakravartin* rules, Maitreya would reach buddhahood sitting under a Dragon-Flower tree (*longhua shu* 龍花樹).[84] Thus, the vision of a new paradise-like world was part of the orthodox Maitreya myth, although the wish to live in this world localized in the

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[82] *Zhuanlun shengwang xiuxing jing,* in *Chang ahan jing,* pp. 41c-42a.

[83] For lists of canonical scriptures related to Maitreya see Ma Xisha; Han Bingfang 馬西沙 幹秉方, *Zhongguo minjian zongjiao shi* 中國民間宗教史. Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1992, pp. 38–40; Tsukamoto, *Shina bukkyō-shi kenkyū*, pp. 564–566 and Zürcher, "Prince Moonlight," p. 13, note 16.

[84] *Foshuo Mile xiasheng jing* 佛説彌勒下生經 (T 453), in *Taishō*, vol. 14, p. 431a/c. The translation of the text is attributed to Dharmarakṣa (active ca. 280–308 CE), but as Zürcher has observed ("Prince Moonlight," p. 13, note 16) it is a literal replica of the Chinese *Ekottarāgama* (*Zengyi a'han jing* 增一阿含經 [T 125]), which was translated in the late fourth century.

distant future of millions of years could only be realized in one of the future rebirths. Nevertheless, this vision of Maitreya's distant paradise without doubt was the source of later heterodox beliefs that transformed it into the expectation of an imminent advent of the new time.

The second point that affected later sectarian beliefs is the tradition of the three Dragon-Flower Assemblies. According to the orthodox traditions, Maitreya, after having attained buddhahood, would teach the true *dharma* and thus humans would reach salvation through enlightenment. Before he would enter *parinirvāṇa* there would be a general salvation. He would hold three great assemblies and teach the multitudes sitting under the Dragon-Flower tree. At the first assembly ninety-six hundred million (*jiushiliu yi* 九十六億) would attain enlightenment, at the second ninety-four hundred million and finally ninety-two hundred million.[85] This theme of the three Dragon-Flower Assemblies was later adopted and elaborated by many sects of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

During the Southern and Northern Dynasties Maitreya was a well-known figure in orthodox Buddhist scriptures, even if he was not expected to descend from the Tuṣita heaven in the immediate future. Not only was he well known, he was also an object of veneration. Evidence of Maitreya's central position in popular Buddhist devotion can be gained from the statues and dated inscriptions in the grottoes of Longmen 龍門 and Yungang 雲岡. From these inscriptions we can see that the popularity of various buddhas changed considerably from the late fifth to the early eighth centuries. During the Northern Wei dynasty statues devoted to Maitreya are almost four times more numerous than those devoted to Amitābha. However, between 650 and 704 Amitābha is represented ten times more often than Maitreya. The amazing rise of Amitābha's popularity thus corresponds to an equally conspicuous decline of Maitreya's.[86]

One could be inclined to attribute the popularity of Maitreya until the sixth century to the popular expectation of his approaching descent. However, as has been remarked, in orthodox Buddhism beliefs of that kind were absent, since the advent of Maitreya was expected only after millions of years. Even if some of the devotees and societies sponsoring

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[85] *Foshuo Mile laishi jing* 佛説彌勒來時經 (T 457), in *Taishō*, vol. 14., p. 535a. The text was translated in the fourth century. Cf. *Foshuo Mile xiasheng jing* (T 453), p. 422c; *Foshuo Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* (T 454), p. 425a/b.

[86] For these calculations see Tsukamoto, *Shina bukkyō-shi kenkyū*, p. 380 and Tang Changru, "Beichao de Mile xinyang ji qi shuailuo", p. 197.

the carving of statues may have held beliefs that were not completely orthodox and worshipped Maitreya as the coming buddha, there is no doubt that Maitreya figured prominently in orthodox Buddhism. Here, it was not the expectation of his near advent on earth that inspired the piety of monks and laypersons, but the hope to be reborn with him in the paradise of the Tuṣita heaven.

The *Gaoseng zhuan* (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*) reports that the eminent monk Dao'an 道安 (312–385) and his disciples frequently expressed vows in front of the image of Maitreya to be reborn in his Tuṣita heaven.[87] Thus, before the Tang dynasty, Maitreya's paradise, the Tuṣita heaven, seems to have had a similar function as later had the Pure Land of Amitābha: It was a transcendental paradise in which the devotees hoped to be reborn after death. Since statues dedicated to Maitreya are much more numerous until the sixth century than those devoted to Amitābha, the wish to be reborn in Maitreya's paradise was obviously widespread during the Southern and Northern Dynasties. Only gradually it was replaced by the hope for rebirth in the Western Paradise of Amitābha. This significant shift of preference after the sixth century is indeed puzzling. An explanation could be that devotion to Maitreya increasingly became a mark of heterodox Buddhist milieus, where the orthodox teachings had been transformed into an eschatological ideology expecting the advent of Maitreya in the present time. The political elites and with them the orthodox clergy could not accept such heterodox beliefs, which too often were connected with rebellions. Accordingly, Maitreya lost his prominent position in orthodox Buddhism. However, on the popular level devotion to Maitreya as the future buddha did not lose its appeal.

Maitreya and popular Buddhist eschatology

While Maitreya is well attested as the future buddha in Indian and early Chinese Buddhism, the origins of the eschatological ideas surrounding him in popular sectarianism are not so explicit. They not only derived from the Buddhist tradition but were heavily influenced by Daoist eschatology and millenarianism, which dated back to Han times.

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[87] *Gaoseng zhuan* (T 2059), *j.* 5, p. 353b. For Dao'an's devotion to Maitreya see Tsukamoto, *A history of early Chinese Buddhism*, pp. 753–756.

There is, however, a number of elements in orthodox Indian and Chinese Buddhism that contributed to the formation of a Buddhist eschatology. One of them was the idea of *kalpa*-cycles. We have met above the idea that the state of the world declined and ascended cyclically. In the scholastic traditions of Indian Buddhism, the basic idea of cyclical decline and increase is further developed as the sequence of different *kalpas* oscillating between the perfect state, when the human life span is eighty thousand years, and the lowest level, when it is only ten years. It is important to note that in this conception alternating phases of degeneration and improvement succeed each other. There is no "final" age in the strict sense but only final phases of either decline or increase, before the direction of development shifts again.[88]

This oscillating process is embedded in an even more comprehensive cycle, which encompasses the complete destruction of the physical world and its renovation leading to a new turn of decline and improvement until the world is again completely annihilated. The length of these cycles is immeasurable, and in the orthodox Buddhist tradition there is not the slightest reference of an imminent end of the present conditions and the beginning of a new *kalpa*. However, just as the coming of Maitreya, which in the orthodox tradition was expected only after millions of years, was reinterpreted in certain milieus as being imminent, some elements of the cosmological speculations about the destruction of the physical world at the end of a Great *kalpa* also found their way into the eschatological beliefs of popular sects.

The *Da loutan jing* 大樓炭經, which was translated during the Western Jin (around 300 CE), describes the three catastrophic changes at the end of a Great kalpa as the catastrophes of fire, flood, and tempest. These three catastrophes are preceded by a time when the moral corruption of humans has reached its utmost and the natural order of the seasons is lost. Then, during a time of incalculable length, the forces of fire, water, and wind bring ever increasing destruction. However, while this empirical world is completely annihilated, human beings are transferred to the transcendental heavens, from where they are brought back after a new world has emerged to live in complete joy and happiness.[89] This theme of the three catastrophes of fire, flood, and tempest seems to have been reinterpreted in the millenarian context

[88] For details cf. Nattier, *Once upon a future time*, pp. 15–19.

[89] *Da Loutan jing* 大樓炭經 (T 23), in *Taishō*, vol. 1, pp. 302c-305b. Cf. Zürcher, "Prince Moonlight," pp. 6 f.

of popular sects not as occurring in the infinite future but as impending catastrophes. They would lead to the end of the present world, which only the virtuous people will survive. The cosmological ideas of the cyclical evolution and destruction of the physical world and the sequences of ages of prosperity and corruption became part of the eschatological scenarios propagated by popular sects.

Another element of the orthodox tradition of Chinese Buddhism that contributed to the formation of eschatological beliefs were theories on the duration of the *dharma*. Even in Indian Buddhism it was assumed that the *dharma* taught by the Buddha would be known and followed by men only for a limited time. There were several theories about how long the Dharma would last until its disappearance from this world.[90] In China this basic assumption was transformed into the theory of the three stages of the *dharma*, namely, the True Dharma (*zhengfa* 正法), the Semblance Dharma (*xiangfa* 像法) and the Final [Period of the] Dharma (*mofa* 末法). As Nattier has shown, this reformulation of the Indian teaching was prompted by some misunderstandings and mistranslations of Buddhist texts,[91] but it probably also responded to the eschatological climate in China during the Southern and Northern Dynasties. The theory on the sequence of the three stages of the Dharma was fully developed and systematized not before the middle of the sixth century.[92]

However, traditions about the extinction of the *dharma* and the circumstances under which it would happen were older; they date back to the early fifth century. One of the earliest references can be found in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (*Dabannihuan jing* 大般泥洹經), which

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[90] For details cf. Étienne Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme indien des origines à l'ère Śaka* (Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain; 14), Louvain-La-Neuve: Université de Louvain Institut Orientaliste, 1976, pp. 210–222.

[91] Nattier, *Once upon a future time*, pp. 65–118.

[92] The theory of the three stages of the *dharma* is elaborated in the *Nanyue Si chanshi li shiyuan wen* 南嶽思大禪師立誓願文 (T 1933), which is commonly attributed to Huisi 慧思 (515–577), the second patriarch of the Tiantai 天台 school. It then was adopted by other leading monks including the Pure Land teacher Daochuo 道綽 (562–645) and above all by Xinxing 信行 (540–594), the founder of the *Sanjiejiao* 三階教 (Teaching of the Three Stages).—On Huisi cf. Paul Magnin, *La vie et l'oeuvre de Huisi (515–577), les origines de la secte bouddhique du Tiantai*, Paris, 1979; on Daochuo cf. David W. Chappell, *Tao-ch'o (562–645). A pioneer of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism*, Ph.D. thesis: Yale University, 1976; on the theory of the three stages cf. James B. Hubbard, *Salvation in the final period of the Dharma: The inexhaustible storehouse of the San-Chieh-Chiao*, Ph.D. thesis: University of Wisconsin, 1986, pp. 10–70.

was translated by Faxian 法顯 after his return from India (414 CE). There the Buddha predicts that after his *nirvāṇa*, during the last eighty years when the True Dharma is about to be extinguished, the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* will be widely spread throughout the world. At the same time, however, evil monks will ally with the devils to corrupt and destroy the True Dharma. They will fake holy scriptures and turn right and wrong upside down. Not only will these monks engage in all kinds of corrupt and unlawful activities, they will also spread heterodox teachings and scriptures.[93] Thus, even in this completely orthodox text the time before the disappearance of the *dharma* is marked above all by the corruption of monks. The same motif is treated at length in the *Fa miejin jing* (*Sūtra on the Extinction of the Dharma*), a work of uncertain origin but existing before 515.[94]

The theme is elaborated even more extensively in the *Xiangfa jueyi jing* 像法決疑經 (*Sūtra Removing Doubts about the Semblance Dharma*), which originated probably in the second half of the sixth century and is listed in the *Zhongjing mulu* among the apocryphal scriptures.[95] In contrast to the orthodox scriptures mentioned so far, the *Xiangfa jueyi jing* specifies the time when the *dharma* will be corrupted: Thousand years after the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha, false teachings will arise. Thousand and one hundred years after the *nirvāṇa*, evil monks and nuns will fill the world. They will no more practise morality but strife after worldly riches instead. While from the outside they appear as monks and nuns wearing clerical robes, they disregard the Buddhist principles and teachings, engage in trade, healing, and heterodox divination, and profane Buddhist images by selling them for profit.[96]

We thus observe a gradual shift from an unspecified prophecy about the extinction of the *dharma*, which will happen somewhen in the future, to the belief that the final period of the *dharma* is right at hand or has been entered already. Orthodox and apocryphal scriptures do not differ much in their assertion that during the final period of the *dharma* the Buddhist *saṃgha* will be corrupted, even if the motif is more elaborated in the apocryphal *Xiangfa jueyi jing*. The same scripture also

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[93] *Foshuo Dabannihuan jing* 佛説大般泥洹經 (T 376), in *Taishō*, vol. 12, *j.* 6, p. 894c.

[94] It is listed in Sengyou's 僧祐 catalogue *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 (T 2145, *j.* 4, p. 28c), which appeared around 515.

[95] *Zhongjing mulu* (T 2147), *j.* 4, p. 172c.

[96] *Foshuo Xiangfa jueyi jing* 佛説像法決疑經 (T 2870), in *Taishō*, vol. 85, p. 1337a/b.

mentions that at the end of the period of the Semblance Dharma all kinds of catastrophes will occur,[97] which introduces an apocalyptic colouring not present in the orthodox scriptures. Orthodox Buddhism provided many of the mythological materials that were used in heterodox eschatological writings. However, the shift from a cosmological to an eschatological context changed the meaning of these images. The prophecies about the future decline of the world and the *dharma* were transformed into interpretations of the present time and inspired expectations of an imminent change of the human condition.

Eschatology and apocalypticism in apocryphal scriptures

While the historical sources reporting on Buddhist-inspired rebellions usually do not give many details about the beliefs of these sects, some of the apocryphal Buddhist scriptures that have survived offer valuable insight into the ideas and beliefs prevailing in heterodox Buddhist milieus. We may assume that similar beliefs had some influence also on the better-known sects that were involved in rebellions or other political incidents. Anyhow, there were people who read and propagated the apocryphal scriptures that were considered heterodox by the clerical elites. This means that Buddhist sectarianism in the medieval ages had its own scriptural traditions, which may be regarded as precursor of the rich sectarian literature that developed in the Ming dynasty. Unfortunately, most of the apocryphal writings are known only by their titles listed in the medieval catalogues of Buddhist scriptures. From those that have been preserved we can see that eschatological beliefs were a significant element in medieval popular Buddhism.

Not all Buddhist texts regarded as apocryphal were sectarian writings. What Western scholars are used to calling "apocryphal" scriptures is a class of texts that in the Buddhist catalogues are more frankly called "spurious" (*wei* 僞) or "dubious" (*yi* 疑) scriptures. In this reasoning authentic *sūtras* were translations from Sanskrit originals, while texts of purely Chinese origin that pretended to be sayings of the Buddha were regarded as spurious. In practice, however, things were less unambiguous. The criteria that led the compilers of catalogues to classify a given scripture as apocryphal were not always made clear and could change from case to case. Besides the question of origin there were other aspects to be taken into account. Thus, the content or the political

[97] *Foshuo Xiangfa jueyi jing*, p. 1338a.

implications of some scriptures might have been regarded as heterodox, which led to exclusion from the canon of orthodox scriptures.[98] What was regarded as orthodox and heterodox depended on the circumstances. Occasionally the same scripture was judged differently at different times. Political considerations played an important part, and finally it was the emperor who decided what was orthodox.[99] This explains why scriptures that contained prophecies and eschatological ideas were particularly prone to being regarded as heterodox and classified as apocryphal.

Not only were such heterodox apocrypha banned from the official Buddhist canon, they were sometimes even physically destroyed. During the Kaihuang era (581–600) of the Sui dynasty five hundred scrolls of such scriptures were burned, which—as Daoxuan 道宣, the compiler of the catalogue *Da Tang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 complaints—did not change much. They still circulated widely in his own time, around 664. Daoxuan saw the general distribution of heterodox scriptures as an evidence that the final period of the *dharma* had been entered, the period when the orthodox teachings are supplanted by heterodoxies.[100] This shows again that the *mofa*-theory could be interpreted in quite different ways. While in sectarian milieus the established clergy in its presumed decadence was regarded as representing the forces opposed to the True Dharma, which were prophesied for the final period, the orthodox monks applied the same judgement to the sectarians. The shift form orthodoxy to heterodoxy did not presuppose a rejection of the orthodox scriptures, it was enough to interpret them in a different way. These different interpretations, however, belonged to traditions that were not always of Buddhist origin. The eschatological attitude found in many apocryphal writings was inspired by the apocalyptic heritage of the popular sects and the Daoist tradition.[101]

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[98] For a general discussion cf. Kyoko Tokuno, "The evaluation of indigenous scriptures in Chinese Buddhist bibliographical catalogues," in *Chinese Buddhist apocrypha*, edited by Robert E. Buswell, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990, pp. 31–74.

[99] Cf. Antonino Forte, "The relativity of the concept of orthodoxy in Chinese Buddhism: Chih-sheng's indictment of Shih-li and the proscription of the *Dharma Mirror Sūtra*," in *Chinese Buddhist apocrypha*, edited by Robert E. Buswell, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990, pp. 239–249.

[100] *Da Tang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 (T 2149), in *Taishō*, vol. 55, *j.* 10, p. 333c.

[101] On the influence of Daoism on Buddhist eschatology cf. Erik Zürcher, "Eschatology and messianism;" idem, "Prince Moonlight."

Part of this tradition was the idea of cosmic crises characterized by disasters and catastrophes that will come upon sinful mankind. As has been noted above, the Buddhist tradition contained elements, such as the concept of *kalpa*-cycles, that could be easily matched with these Chinese notions. Other elements of the Daoist eschatology, however, had no match in orthodox Buddhism. Thus, the idea that only a small minority of elected people (*zhongmin*) will be saved while the majority of the sinners is doomed to annihilation contradicts the Mahāyāna teaching of universal salvation. Another important difference concerns the eschatological chronology. While the Buddhist traditions put eschatological concepts in cosmological contexts of incalculable time spans, Daoist scriptures describe the eschatological events as imminent. The basic structure of the apocryphal Buddhist eschatologies was borrowed from the Chinese tradition: the expectation of an impending catastrophe destroying the sinners and ushering a new time of perfection, where the true believers will live in complete happiness. To the degree that Buddhist notions and symbols penetrated all layers of Chinese society, this basic structure was draped with Buddhist elements, resulting in a gradual substitution of Daoist symbols by Buddhist ones. Thus, the way was paved for integrating apocalyptic beliefs into popular Buddhism.

The merging of Daoist and Buddhist elements in the development of Chinese eschatological thinking can be observed in a number of sources. In the *Dongyuan shenzhou jing*, which was the central scripture of a group at the margins of the Daoist movement, Buddhist elements are already apparent but the apocalyptic symbolism is still purely Daoist.[102] This is different in the *Taishang Lingbao Laozi huahu miaojing* where Daoist and Buddhist symbols are freely mixed, even if the Daoist origin is still unmistakable.[103] Thus, the main deity is called *Tianzun* (Celestial Venerable) and identified with Laozi. On the other hand, however, he is equated with the Buddha. The cosmic catastrophes occur at the end of a "Great *Kalpa*" (*dajie* 大劫), a term of Buddhist origin (*mahākalpa*), but the new age is called *taiping* (Great Peace), which derives from the Chinese tradition. And in the new world of *taiping* not only will the Daoist saviour *zhenjun* (True Lord) be present, the Buddha Maitreya will, too. The description of the future world of *taiping* is full of details deriving from the Buddhist tradition.[104] In this scripture, the

[102] Cf. Mollier, *Une apocalypse taoïste*, pp. 73 f and above pp. 81 ff.

[103] Cf. above pp. 90 f.

[104] Cf. Seidel, "Le *sūtra* merveilleux du Ling-pao Suprême," pp. 323 f. The Buddhist

metamorphosis of popular eschatological beliefs from a Daoist to a Buddhist form has covered nearly half of its way. In the middle of the sixth century, when the *History of the Wei Dynasty* was compiled, the development seems to have reached a point where in common understanding eschatological beliefs were attributed first and foremost to the Buddhist tradition rather than to Daoism.[105]

Medieval catalogues of Buddhist scriptures list many titles which bear the mark of eschatological and apocalyptical thinking. They deal with themes such as the impending catastrophes of the final age and the immediate advent of Maitreya who would subjugate the demons and separate the sinners from the happy ones.[106] Such scriptures are severely criticised by the compilers of the catalogues as forgeries fabricated by heretics. They are said to mislead the ignorant folk who in great number believe in such absurdities.[107] This shows that texts of this kind were popular in sectarian milieus of the lower classes where they probably had some influence on the ideology of religious rebels such as Faqing. Since the orthodox monks and the political authorities regarded such writings as harmful to the public order, they were often confiscated and destroyed and thus most of them were lost during the ages. However, the few texts that have been preserved give us an impression of their apocalyptic ideas. Erik Zürcher has thoroughly analysed two of these scriptures, the *Shouluo biqiu jing* 首羅比丘經 (*Scripture of the monk Shouluo*, short: *Shouluo jing*)[108] and the *Puxian pusa shuo zhengming jing* 普賢菩薩説證明經 (*Scripture on the Realization of Understanding preached by the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra*, short: *Zhengming jing*).[109]

elements are transferred from a cosmological to an eschatological context. For instance, the description of the new world as flat i.e., without the hindrance of mountains and valleys, recalls the Buddhist description of the time when a *cakravartin* rules and men live for eighty thousand years (cf. *Chang ahan jing, j.* 6, p. 41c).

[105] The *Weishu*, introducing Daoist eschatological ideas, remarks "They [i.e. the Daoists] speak also of the numbers of *kalpas*, more or less in the same way as the Buddhist *sūtras*." (*Weishu, j.* 114, p. 3048) The author obviously expects the reader to be more familiar with the Buddhist eschatology than with the Daoist one.

[106] Cf. Zürcher, "Prince Moonlight," p. 14.

[107] E.g. *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, by Zhisheng 智昇 (T 2873), in *Taishō*, vol. 55, p. 672c.

[108] The text, of which several incomplete manuscripts exist, one of which is reprinted in the Taishō Tripitaka (T 2873, vol. 85, pp. 1356–1358), can be dated to the sixth century. Cf. Zürcher, "Prince Moonlight," p. 34, note 63.

[109] The text seems to have been written in the second half of the sixth century. A critical edition based on three Dunhuang manuscripts of this text has been included into the Taishō Tripitaka (T 2879) vol. 85, pp. 1362–1368. In addition there are four

Although the texts differ in many details, they show a common pattern of eschatological ideas. Behind a mythological scenario of prophecies and revelations and the description of the terrifying events that mark the approaching end of the present world lies a dichotomical structure of world interpretation. This dichotomy manifests itself in a number of oppositions: sinners and pious believers, destruction and salvation, the forces of evil and the celestial agents, darkness and light, and finally the opposition between the corrupt and morally degenerated world of the present and the future paradise-like world of bliss and happiness. While ostensibly the scriptures describe future events, their internal message is a coded interpretation of the present. It is a message that sharply devaluates the present world depicting it as full of sin and doomed to extinction. The baleful state of the world is contrasted to the supernatural bliss of the future existence in the transformed world[110] to be enjoyed by the elected few who will be saved.

Thus, the texts confront their readers or audience with a choice to be made. They have to decide where they belong to: to the sinners who submit to the decadent ways of the world or to the pious believers who resist moral corruption. It is, therefore, of only secondary importance to which degree the colourful description of the future world was taken literally by the believers. The *Zhengming jing* asserts that the transformed new world will be real and is no empty talk,[111] and we may suppose that for many it was a very real hope. However, it would probably be wrong to assume that the vast majority of those who were attracted by texts of that kind was living in fear of the impending end of the world. To be sure, there were some millenarian rebellions in the sixth and seventh centuries that expected the near advent of Maitreya, and they were probably influenced by texts similar to the *Shouluo jing* and the *Zhengming jing*. But the wide distribution of such texts and the reference made to them even in imperial propaganda suggest that they were usually understood in a more moderate way. As we know from the history of religions, it is possible to understand apocalyptic scriptures

other manuscripts. For details cf. Zürcher, "Prince Moonlight," 35, note 64. Parts of the scripture have been summarized by Antonino Forte, *Political propaganda and ideology*, pp. 271–280.

[110] The new world is called *huacheng* 化城, "transformed city" (*Zhengming jing*, p. 1366a). The expression recalls the *Lotus Sūtra* where in chapter seven the appearance of a "magical city" (*huacheng*) is described as a skilful means to lead ignorant men to salvation.

[111] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1366a.

in a variety of ways. The same text can have different meanings in different contexts.Taking into account that the *Zhengming jing* and the *Shouluo jing* were used and widely circulated from the sixth century on at least to the end of the Tang dynasty, one cannot expect them to have been understood in only one sense.[112]

That these texts were open to interpretation can be seen from the efforts made by the orthodox commentators of the *Dayun jing* 大雲經 (*Great Cloud sūtra*) to give the *Zhengming jing* a different meaning. They referred to this scripture in a way that eliminated its apocalyptic elements. In their interpretation, the hopes for a regeneration of the world were canalized and directed to the rule of empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 684–704), which in this way was given a religious legitimation.[113] Similar attempts to transform popular millenarian expectations into a means of political propaganda can be found as early as in the fifth century when Northern Wei rulers encouraged their identification with the bodhisattva Maitreya.[114] Although we do not know to which degree such interpretations were accepted by the populace, they show that the texts could be understood in quite different ways. To use them for the legitimation of the existing rule was certainly an extreme form of reinterpretation. The other extreme was militant millenarianism as exemplified in religious rebellions. However, the great popularity and wide distribution of such texts during the Sui and Tang do not support the conclusion that apocalyptic fears and millenarian hopes were equally common. In fact, reports on religious rebellions are not particularly numerous after the middle of the seventh century, while these scriptures continued to be transmitted. They obviously had an appeal even if no intense eschatological atmosphere prevailed.

History teaches that fervent apocalyptic expectations are rarely maintained for decades or even centuries. There may be occasional outbursts, but the transmission of apocalyptic scriptures alone does not suffice to induce them. The scriptures provide a reservoir of latent ideas that can be activated under certain circumstances. However,

[112] A well-known example for changing interpretations is the New Testament. Its eschatological message of the second coming of Christ was soon transformed from the expectation of an imminent *parousia* to more general interpretations of human destiny. Nevertheless, the text remained the same. Under certain historical conditions, however, the eschatological elements, which are most evident in the *Apocalypse of John (Revelation)*, inspired apocalyptic and millenarian movements even in medieval and modern times.

[113] Forte, *Political propaganda and ideology*, p. 161.

[114] Jan Nattier, "The meanings of the Maitreya," p. 31.

even if the focus of attention is not the imminent end of the present condition, apocalyptic and messianic writings may contain a religious message that responds to the feelings of the believers. Since the texts were transmitted in spite of their being regarded as heterodox, we can conclude that they conveyed a religious meaning that was significant at least to some groups of believers. Apocalyptic writings are not less interpretations of the present than they are expectations of future events. And the interpretations of the present may be significant even if the future events are reduced to a mythological imagery whose realization transcends history. Consider the underlying structure of the texts mentioned above. They radically oppose the corrupt state of the existing world to the ideal world inaugurated by supernatural saviours. The opposition is radical because there is no mediation between the two conditions, which is mythologically expressed through the inevitable destruction of the existing world. It is not a universal destruction, however, for the pious believers will be saved. They belong to the other world even though they live in this world. Thus, the scriptures construct an equally radical opposition between the virtuous and the sinners. They are radically separated now as they will be radically separated in the last days, the former standing "east of the bridge" and the latter "west of the bridge."[115] There is no middle way between them.

These visions reflect an understanding of salvation that departs from traditional Mahāyāna teachings. Salvation is not universal but confined to the few who have made the right choice. Even if the mythological symbols, the names of the supernatural beings, and the cosmological notions are clearly Buddhist, the apocalyptic and messianic scenarios bear the mark of Daoist and popular sectarianism. The people who believed in these scriptures saw themselves as separated from the rest. The world is experienced as being dominated by the forces of evil and no compromise with them seems possible. One can easily imagine how such ideas could be transformed into militant sectarianism and violent attacks on the world of evil, as in the notorious rebellion of Faqing. Militant action, however, was an extreme, antagonistic form, which did not represent the main stream of this sectarian tradition. More common were probably moderate varieties: ardent believers con-

[115] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1366b. Another passage says "east of the water" resp. "west of the water" (p. 1365c).

tenting themselves with the consciousness of belonging to the chosen few who will be saved amidst a world full of sinners doomed to extinction.

In a Buddhist context apocalyptic ideas could easily retain their significance for the believers even if the date of the expected apocalypse was not specified and left open. The religious meaning of the apocalypse did not depend on the belief that these final events of destruction or salvation would happen in one's present life. The belief in continuous rebirths, which by the middle of the first millennium was generally accepted, made it possible to preach that all living men and women have to make their choice in view of the final separation of sinners and virtuous people. There was no need to propagate that these events will happen in the immediate future. Of course, the *Zhengming jing* and particularly the *Shouluo jing* could be understood in such a way, but the scriptures are heterogeneous enough to allow different interpretations. Thus, the first part of the *Zhengming jing* does not refer to apocalyptic events at all, although the basic structure of the message is the same as in the second part that deals with the apocalypse. It is the dichotomy of the virtuous and the sinners, of eternal bliss and eternal punishment. The virtuous people will be able to see Maitreya while the sinners will enter the Avīci hell and will be reborn there forever.[116] Now, "to see Maitreya" can mean to witness the descent of Maitreya. But it can also mean to see Maitreya through being reborn in the Tuṣita heaven. The promise that the true believers "before long will all see Maitreya"[117] could be understood as predicting the immediate advent of Maitreya or as the hope of being saved in the Pure Land of Maitreya. The text is open to different interpretations depending on the preferences of the believers or the sectarian groups. Even the second part of the *Zhengming jing*, where apocalyptic imageries are prominent, allows moderate interpretations. More important than the apocalyptic destructions of the present world is the individual fate of the human beings. The scripture states that those who have accumulated merit will be collected by a huge bird with golden feathers and carried to the Tuṣita heaven from where Maitreya will descent when the time is full. The sinners, however, will be tortured, blood flowing from the nine orifices of their bodies, and they will be thrown into hell from where they will never escape.[118]

[116] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1364c.
[117] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1363b, line 1.
[118] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1366c.

Scriptures dealing with the advent of Maitreya and apocalyptic prophecies certainly had some influence on millenarian and messianic movements. They were the Buddhist versions of a millenarian tradition that derived from popular and Daoist sources. However, as in the Daoist tradition where a scripture like the *Taiping jing* through the centuries lost its original millenarian context, Buddhist apocalyptic and messianic writings had no immutable meaning. They could be used in a variety of contexts and depending on them conveyed different messages. Their conspicuous popularity in some religious milieus during the Tang dynasty does not permit the conclusion that millenarian expectations were equally popular during that time. Millenarianism and messianism were one context where these scriptures attained significance, and it was this context that made them potentially subversive and dangerous to the political order. Hence, they were classified as heretical. The historical evidence does not suggest, however, that millenarian movements played a major role during the Tang. The apocryphal literature contained, as it were, a latent millenarianism that could become fervent under certain conditions. The vast majority of believers probably was attracted by other aspects and longed for the presence of Maitreya in a sense not very different from the hope of others to be reborn in the Western Paradise of Amitābha. In this context, salvation was not understood as taking place in this mundane world but was projected into a transcendental world.

Though messianic hopes for an imminent change of the present condition were in most cases not the primary concern of the believers, one has to note that the spirit of these scriptures departs from the Mahāyāna piety focusing on the Western Paradise of Amitābha. While the Western Paradise and the Tuṣita heaven may be regarded as more or less equivalent, the teachings of salvation are obviously different. The compassion of Amitābha makes salvation attainable for all beings, even the worst of sinners. The Maitreyism of the apocryphal writings on the other hand does not teach universal salvation. It is a teaching that describes not only the eternal bliss of the saved but at the same time emphasises the horror of eternal damnation for those who have failed to make the right choice. There is no room for compassion for the sinners, which makes the teachings threatening even if the apocalypse was not regarded as imminent. People attracted by such teachings had to take their religion seriously, it was nothing for the lax and the common. Those who accepted these teachings must have been highly

committed to their religion, which means that they belonged to a sectarian milieu.

4. The Social Dimension of Heterodox Buddhist Sectarianism

Orthodox Buddhism in medieval China was a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon comprising learned monks as well as masses of half-educated monastery dwellers, the managers of huge clerical estates in the capital as well as recluses living in small huts in the mountains, laypersons belonging to the literati class and the inner circles of political power as well as poor peasant women. Similarly, heterodox Buddhism was no unified movement but included such heterogeneous forms as the wealthy monks of the Sect of the Three Stages (*Sanjie jiao* 三階教) and charlatans such as the rustic Bai Tieyu.[119] While the extreme forms of both orthodoxy and heterodoxy, the state-supported clerical establishment on the one side and Buddhist rebels on the other, can be easily distinguished, there was also much overlap. In the vast field of everyday Buddhism as believed and practised by the common people, the distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy was less manifest. There were certainly no Buddhists classifying themselves as heterodox, and their being regarded as heterodox by the clerical and political authorities depended more on social and political than on doctrinal considerations. Ideas and beliefs prevailing in heterodox circles were to some extent also known to and accepted by ordinary Buddhist believers though they were less conspicuous there. Without doubt, orthodox or heterodox traditions that in theory belonged to different spheres, in practice often overlapped. The same people could use orthodox scriptures and heterodox scriptures together, as the orthodox commentators of the *Dayun jing* who quoted the apocryphal *Zhengming jing*. "Heterodox" ideas were not confined to closely connected groups of sectarians but floated within the cultural and religious space.

Furthermore, ideas and practices regarded as heterodox were extremely diverse, including not only millenarian and messianic traditions but also prophecies and all kind of popular superstitious practice.[120] If we understand heterodox Buddhism in such a broad sense, it is virtually impossible to specify its social location since heterodox ideas and prac-

[119] For Bai Tieyu cf. above note 75.

[120] For some practices of the "left *dao*" see *Cefu yuangui, j.* 159, p. 1924b.

tices permeated all layers of the society. On the other hand, certain ideas condensed in cults and sects that had a following of committed believers. Although the available information on such groups is sparse because historiographers had no reason to save them from historical oblivion, we can collect some scattered data. Since a major source are apocryphal scriptures, it should be stressed that these data do not allow to generalize about the social composition of all heterodox groups in medieval times. However, the sects connected with these scriptures surpassed other heterodox movements in social influence.

Social composition of sectarian groups

As has been noted above, scriptures such as the *Shouluo jing* and the *Zhengming jing* preach an uncompromising message that demanded high commitment of the believers to secure salvation and escape from eternal damnation. Now, many scriptures explain who will belong to the saved, and thereby give some hints on the social composition of the believers who were probably attracted by them. Not surprisingly, the adherents of these teachings do not seem to have belonged to the privileged classes. Privilege depended not only on wealth and power but also on gender. Women held a low position in the Confucian order of society. It is not surprising, therefore, that women seem to have been particularly attracted by religious teachings preaching a new dispensation that would supersede the injustice of the present condition. Even in the *Sūtra on the Extinction of the Dharma* (*Fa miejin jing*), which—though not regarded as apocryphal—exhibits an eschatological spirit, women are described as morally superior to men. Because of the many merits they have accumulated they will live much longer than men in the final period of the *dharma*.[121] The same text makes clear that monks and nuns disregarding their religious obligations are the main symptom of the decline of the *dharma*. A certain tension between the pious believers following the teachings of the Buddha on the one hand and the clerical establishment on the other can be seen in the *Zhengming jing*. The second part of the scripture classifies those who will be rescued from the final catastrophe: 1. old men, 2. old lay women (lit. "old mothers"), 3. virtuous women, 4. virtuous men, 5. the poor, 6. the lower classes, 7. little children, 8. monks and nuns.[122] We may assume that this ranking

[121] *Foshuo Fa miejin jing* (T 369), p. 1119a.

[122] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1365c.

reflects to some degree the social composition of those who turned to the teachings of this *sūtra*. They apparently represented the destitute and marginalized, the old and underprivileged who had to endure suffering and misery in the present world. They could find consolation in the prospect of eternal bliss in a future life.

While the majority of the believers were laypersons, monks are not totally excluded from salvation. In the first part of the *Zhengming jing*, it is explained in more detail who will be among the happy ones to enjoy the presence of the Buddha Maitreya. It is noteworthy that there monks and nuns are not treated as a single class but differentiated according to their behaviour. The text makes it clear that only certain clerics are among the saved and their religious status as monks seems to be of only secondary importance. The enumeration of those who will enjoy the presence of Maitreya begins with "virtuous men and women who have shaved their heads and abandoned family life to study the way (*xue dao* 學道). They wear clerical robes and dwell in mountains and forests where they study the way and practise *dhūta*-asceticism (*toutuo kuxing* 頭陀苦行)." The second position is given to "virtuous men and women who have shaved their had" and engage in preaching and converting men to follow the moral precepts of the Buddha thus practising the spirit of a bodhisattva. The text continues in enumerating various forms of virtuous men and women who engage in good works and keep the rules for lay Buddhists. They all would be able to see Maitreya.[123] They are contrasted with ordained monks who are Buddhist only in outward appearance.

> Concerning monks and nuns who have shaved their heads and wear the clerical robe: Even if they have [received full ordination and] accepted the two hundred fifty rules but do not keep them, they are not equal to those who accept [only] the ten rules and practise the ten good works, who have given up luxury and exquisite robes, concentrate their mind, and sincerely practise austerities; who never have their mind polluted and dispassionately show benevolence and love, practise the ten good works, concentrate their mind, and practise austerities; [...] who [wander around to] all places, to villages and hamlets to preach to the people; who chant in the morning and recite in the evening to rescue and deliver all living beings; who teach the stupid and simple-minded to come out of the dirty mud [of this world] and guide all beings to leave behind sorrow and

[123] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1363a.

> anguish. [...] Such people receive the *dao* and before long all meet Maitreya.[124]

To "receive the *dao*" (*de dao*) may here refer to membership in the sectarian community.[125] In any case the scripture describes the form of religious life expected from the members of the community that used it. It praises a definite sort of religious devotee: ascetics and wandering mendicants preaching among the common people. It is presumably this class of religious virtuosos who were the propagators of the teachings of the *Zhengming jing*. Their followers are described as strictly observing the rules of lay-Buddhists and living a life of high morality. The members of these groups saw themselves in sharp contrast to the ordinary Buddhist clergy and laypersons, who did not take the teaching seriously.

It should be noted that the devotees who hold the highest position are not called *biqiu* 比丘 (*bhikṣu*, monk) or *shamen* 沙門 (*śramaṇa*) but "virtuous men and women who have shaved their head and abandoned family life." Presumedly, many of them were not fully ordained monks and nuns but a sort of rigorous lay believers who had accepted the ten primary commands for monks without being regularly ordained and submitted to the 250 full commands of the *śramaṇa*.[126] By contrast, the first three classes of those wicked people who will not be able to see Maitreya are monks (*śramaṇa*) who do not follow the monastic rules. They spoil the clerical robes, indulge in wine and meat, and corrupt the Three Jewels. Together with others who do not adhere to the Buddhist precepts, the insincere lay Buddhists and wicked officials, they will enter the Avīci hell and never escape the cycle of transmigration.[127]

This all suggests that the leading propagators of the *Zhengming jing* were fervent devotees who preached strict obedience to the Buddhist commands. They may have been monks at the margins of the official *saṃgha* criticizing the low moral standards of the majority.[128] As religious

[124] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1363a/b.

[125] In sectarian scriptures of the Ming dynasty, *de dao* is a technical term meaning initiation into a sect community. Cf. below p. 232.

[126] According to the *Foshuo Guanding jing* 佛說灌頂經, *j.* 12 (T 1331, in *Taishō*, vol. 21, p. 534b, lines 4–6) there are two kinds of lay Buddhists who have taken the Three Refuges and follow five respectively ten commands. In contrast, those who have taken the vows of a bodhisattva accept twenty-four commands, the monks (*śramaṇa*) 250, and the nuns 500.

[127] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1364b/c.

[128] A similar group of ascetic monks was connected with the *Guanding jing*. There

zealots teaching the destruction of the sinners they attracted a following of lay Buddhists who belonged mainly to the lower and underprivileged classes. Accordingly, among the sinners who will enter hell are the wealthy, the highly promoted, and great officials who use their power to kill the virtuous and exploit the common people.[129] Thus, the *Zhengming jing* reflects an opposition to both the clerical and the political establishment. The sectarians who accepted the teachings of this scripture found consolation in the promise that the present injustice would finally be overcome, that virtue will be rewarded, and moral corruption punished eternally. Given the severe punishment of the unbelievers and evil-doers, the *Zhengming jing* displays a spirit of religious rigorism demanding high commitment of the believers:

> If virtuous men and virtuous women want to chant this *dhāraṇī* they have to keep the five commands [for the lay Buddhists], to abstain from wine, meat, and the five spices, they must fast each month on six days and twice a year keep the long fasting periods, they must practise the ritual of circumambulation of the Buddha six times a day and concentrate their mind to practise austerities.[130]

These are the rules for committed lay Buddhists.[131] People who wanted to follow these rules had to submit their life under strict religious discipline, which clearly sets them apart from the mass of ordinary Buddhist believers. The *Zhengming jing* furthermore idealizes the ascetics living far from the cities and devoting themselves to religious exercises and meditation. Asceticism and moral discipline is also expected from the ordinary believers. Abstention from meat and liquor and fasting are particularly stressed. Besides ritual worship of the Buddha, the religious practices included the recitation of the two *dhāraṇīs* transmitted in the scripture. They consist of the names of nine and seven buddhas. The recitation of these *dhāraṇīs* will protect against all evils if those who

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the "old and influential monks" are criticized, who do not listen to this scripture and accuse the young and little educated monks for spreading heterodox views. (*Guanding jing, j.* 4, p. 507b). Cf. Michel Strickmann, "The *Consecration Sūtra*: A Buddhist book of spells," in *Chinese Buddhist apocrypha*, edited by Robert E. Buswell, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990, pp. 75–118: 89.

[129] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1364c.

[130] *Zhengming jing*, pp. 1363c-1364a.

[131] The rules for fasting of lay Buddhists (*upāsaka, upāsikā*) who follow the five commands (*pañcaśīla*) are described in Xi Chao's 郤超 *Fengfa yao* 奉法要 translated by Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China*, pp. 164 f.

recite them are virtuous. If, however, they are recited by evil persons it will bring great harm upon them.[132]

It appears that the believers who transmitted this text formed sectarian groups that were led by radical monks or celibate laypersons without ordination. Great importance is given to preaching and missionary work, which explains the wide distribution of the scripture. However, even though certain monks seem to have played leading roles in such groups, they were basically lay movements. It is not the ordination as a monk that secures religious prestige and privilege, but asceticism and strict obedience to the Buddhist precepts, which is possible for monks and laypersons alike. Thus, these sectarians kept a distance to the official *saṃgha*. They regarded their own understanding of Buddhism as the single way to salvation.

The sect connected with the *Zhengming jing* regarded this scripture and its *dhāraṇīs* as containing the essence of its particular teachings and an indispensable key to salvation. There were other groups which focused on other texts including the *Shouluo jing*. The concentration on certain scriptures was a mark of distinction between different sectarian traditions and we may assume that there was quite a number of such traditions. While there were various groups identified by the veneration of different texts, it seems that many of them shared a common stock of ideas and symbols.

Common sectarian traditions

One of these symbols is *mingwang* 明王, which can be translated as *Luminous King* or *King of Light*. Though the term is not unknown in orthodox Buddhism as a designation for the demon fighting messengers of Vairocana, it acquires a distinctive meaning in apocryphal scriptures. The *Zhenming jing* explains the coming of the Luminous King against the background of the apocalyptic events that mark the end of the present world: Seven hundred years after the *nirvāṇa* of Śākyamuni, heaven and earth will tremble, and all dirt and evil will be removed. Those who have the Law will all live, while those without the Law will be extinguished. After ninety-nine years, the whole cosmos will experience six types of quakes and for seven days the sun will be darkened. Then,

[132] *Zhengming jing*, pp. 1363c-1364a. On the use of *dhāraṇīs* in Buddhist practice cf. Reis-Habito, *Die Dhāraṇī des Großen Erbarmens*.

> after a few days heaven will bring forth the Luminous King and the earth will bring forth the Holy Ruler (*shengzhu* 聖主). The Two Holy Ones will jointly rule the Divine Continent (*shenzhou* 神州, i.e. China). Good indeed is their work of transformation which expands and elevates [again] the Law of the Buddha. Their compassion will rescue all beings from the realm of life and death (i.e., *saṃsāra*), so that they can leave the burning house [i.e., the world of suffering and illusion] and will meet the Great Vehicle (*dacheng*, Mahāyāna). [The Two Holy Ones] will guide out of the realm of life and death and show the way to the Transformed City (*huacheng* 化城).[133] When the Luminous King and the Holy Ruler will be together in the Transformed City, golden drums will be beaten on the towers to inform all children of the Law. Those who through their karma are destined to this Law will find it, even if they are ten thousand miles away. Those, however, who are not destined to this Law will remain deaf, even if the drums are beaten right by their side.[134]

The now familiar opposition between believers who will enjoy living in a new world, and sinners who will be excluded is seen once again in this passage. There are several additional details deserving attention because they reveal a common stock of sectarian beliefs.

According to the *Zhengming jing*, the restoration of the true *dharma* after its extinction will be enacted by two saviour figures, the Luminous King (*mingwang*) and the Holy Ruler (*shengzhu*). While the role of the Holy Ruler is obscure, the Luminous King is obviously identified with Maitreya: Attaining salvation from the world of *saṃsāra* is alternatively described as "meeting this Luminous King" (*de jian ci mingwang* 得見此明王), or as "meeting Maitreya" (*de jian Mile* 得見彌勒) and "ascending to Tuṣita Heaven."[135] *Maitreya* and *Luminous King* are equivalent symbols denoting the saviour whose presence symbolizes salvation. Now, the term *mingwang* or Luminous King occurs also in the *Shouluo jing*. There, however, Luminous King is an epithet of the bodhisattva Yueguang 月光 (Moonlight).[136] It is Yueguang who will appear after the catastro-

[133] The *burning house* (*huo zhai* 火宅) and the *transformed city* (*huacheng*) are both references to the *Lotus Sūtra*, chapters 3 and 7. (I have to thank Max Deeg for this observation.) The burning house stands for the world of *saṃsāra*, from which the beings are rescued by the Buddha. The transformed city is a skilful means of the Buddha to lead the beings out of the world of *saṃsāra*. In the *Lotus Sūtra* it stands for the goal of salvation, while in eschatological contexts it signifies the new world.

[134] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1366a/b. Cf. Forte, *Political propaganda and ideology*, pp. 279 f.

[135] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1366b, line 16: "meeting this Luminous King"; 1366c, line 12: "ascending to Tuṣita Heaven"; 1663a, line 3 *et passim*: "meeting Maitreya."

[136] *Shouluo jing*, p. 1357b, lines 2–3: "*Yueguang*, the Luminous King, is now...;" p.

phes of the final age, and only the virtuous people will be able to see him.[137] The parallel to the appearance of Maitreya or the Luminous King in the *Zhengming jing* is evident. Both Maitreya and Yueguang are called "Luminous King" and they are structurally equivalent as the saviours whose appearance will inaugurate the new world. The figure of Yueguang seems to be just another symbolic expression of the idea of a future saviour who is usually called Maitreya.[138] Thus, the beliefs of the sect connected with the *Shouluo jing* were quite similar to the one connected with the *Zhengming jing*, the main difference being the use of slightly different mythological symbols: Yueguang instead of Maitreya. Also the social composition of the two sects was similar. They consisted mainly of highly committed laypersons who laid much stress on abstinence from meat and wine, fasting and asceticism (*kuxing* 苦行).[139]

A common denominator of the *Shouluo jing* and the *Zhengming jing* is the use of the symbol *mingwang* as a designation for the expected saviour. Both scriptures seem to be part of a wider tradition where the hope of being reborn in Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven and the expectation of his future descent on earth have been combined to an eschatological belief that included the idea of a final separation of the virtuous and the sinners. Somehow the term *mingwang* or Luminous King as an epithet of the future saviour has been included in this heterodox tradition. Incidentally, this term allows to relate the tradition represented by these two scriptures to some historical incidents in the fifth and sixth centuries. The most striking parallel to the *Zhengming jing* can be found in the biography of the high officer Wang Yi 王誼 (second half of sixth century) who was sentenced to commit suicide because he had planned a rebellion. The *History of the Northern Dynasties* reports that Wang Yi had declared to be the Luminous King and the Holy Ruler (*mingwang shengzhu*),[140] recalling exactly the terminology of the *Zhengming jing*. From

1357c, lines 24–25: "The Great King asks the Luminous King [...] and *Yueguang* answers the Great King..."

[137] *Shouluo jing*, p. 1356a.

[138] The close association if not identification of Yueguang with Maitreya is evident from the fact that the centre of the city, which will emerge with the arrival of *Yueguang* is called Tuṣita city, recalling the name of Maitreya's Tuṣita heaven (*Shouluo jing*, p. 1356b, line 2).

[139] Cf. *Shouluo jing*, pp. 1356b, 1356c, 1357a.

[140] *Beishi* 北史, by Li Yanshou 李延壽, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974 (1995), *j.* 61, p. 2167; cf. Liu Ts'un-yan, "Traces of Zoroastrian and Manichaean activities in pre-T'ang China," in *Selected papers from the Hall of Harmonious Wind*, Leiden: Brill, 1976, pp. 3–58: 36.

this we can see that the tradition to which this scripture belonged was widely known already in the sixth century. However, it can be traced back even further. In 514 the *śramaṇa* Liu Sengshao 劉僧紹 led a rebellion and accepted the title *ming fa wang* 明法王 ("Luminous Dharma King").[141] *Ming fa wang* is occasionally used in the *Zhengming jing* as a synonym of *mingwang*.[142] Even a few years earlier in 499 a certain Wang Huiding 王惠定 had adopted the similar title *ming fa huangdi* 明法皇帝 ("Luminous Dharma Emperor").[143] Both titles suggest that the epithet *mingwang* as a designation for a prophesied ruler was already known by the end of the fifth century. It must have been a rather popular tradition for otherwise it could not have been used to inspire rebellions.

From Lu Yuan's memorial[144] we know that in the late fifth century *zhaihui* 齋會 were mushrooming in the eastern part of north China. *Zhaihui* is usually translated as "vegetarian societies", but it can also mean "fasting societies". As we have seen, the sectarian groups connected with the *Zhengming jing* and the *Shouluo jing* paid particular attention to abstinence from meat and wine and the observation of fasting periods. Lu Yuan's memorial shows that similar groups were already active in the fifth century. At least some of them were related to the rebellions led by *śramaṇa*, which have been described above. Thus, the social composition of these religious societies corresponds to what we have deduced from the *Zhengming jing*. They were led by religious professionals while the majority of members were laypersons.

Lu Yuan's apprehension that such sects could easily develop into rebellious movements became true in a most dramatic way with Faqing's rebellion of 515. Faqing was called a *śramaṇa*, but his following consisted mostly of lay people. Thus, this apocalyptic movement may have been related to the popular Buddhist tradition from which the *Zhengming jing* and the *Shouluo jing* derived. There is one remarkable detail which supports this assumption. Faqing adopted the title *Dacheng* (Great Vehicle, Mahāyāna). This is a strange name for a person. Yet, in the *Zhengming jing* we find a sentence where *Dacheng* could be understood as referring to a person: "Their compassion will rescue all beings from the realm of life and death (i.e., *saṃsāra*), so that they can leave the

[141] *Weishu, j.* 8, p. 215, *j.* 105 A, p. 2340; *Beishu, j.* 3, p. 142.

[142] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1365c, line 19.

[143] *Weishu, j.* 8, p. 191; *Beishi, j.* 4, p. 131.

[144] See above p. 109.

burning house [of the world of suffering and illusions] and will meet the Great Vehicle (*dacheng*, Mahāyāna)."[145] In the context of the scripture *dacheng* probably means the Mahāyāna teaching as a way to salvation. However, the phrase "meet *Dacheng*" (*de jian dacheng* 得見大乘, lit.: "attain the vision of *Dacheng*") is exactly parallel to "meet Maitreya" (*de jian Mile*) and "meet this Luminous King" (*de jian ci mingwang*). Thus, the phrase could be understood as referring to a person called *Dacheng*. In this case *Dacheng* would be grammatical subject of the following phrase, which had to be translated: "He [i.e., *Dacheng*] will guide out of the realm of life and death and show the way to the Transformed City." To be sure, this is probably not what the text originally meant; however, it could be understood in this way. It might be that Faqing did so when he took the title *Dacheng* and thus assumed the role of the attendant who guides to the new world of Maitreya. This exactly corresponds to what we know about Faqing's teachings. Unfortunately, the evidence is too sparse to allow definite conclusions and we must leave it at that.[146]

While it must remain open whether Faqing was influenced by the *Zhengming jing* or its earlier versions, we can be sure that his sect belonged to a sectarian milieu where scriptures similar to the *Zhengming jing* and the *Shouluo jing* were used. As has been observed above,[147] another group in the early sixth century, which was probably an off-spring of Faqing's sect, venerated a young boy as *Yueguang tongzi* ("Prince Moonlight"). Thus, the whole symbolism of Maitreya, *mingwang*, and *Yueguang* appearing in scriptures such as the *Zhengming jing* and the *Shouluo jing* can be found in popular religious groups flourishing in the northeastern region of present-day Hebei province in the late fifth and early sixth centuries. All evidence taken together, it seems that the ideas represented in these scriptures were connected with sectarian traditions dating back at least to the end of the fifth century.[148] This does not necessarily mean that the *Zhengming jing* as a scripture existed already that early. However, apparently similar ideas were transmitted in various scriptures

[145] Cf. above p. 146.

[146] *Dacheng* was used as a personal title also by the monk Gao Tancheng who in 618 adopted the title *Dacheng Huangdi* 大乘皇帝 ("Great Vehicle Emperor"). Cf. above pp. 120 f.

[147] Cf. pp. 115 f.

[148] The earliest record of a sectarian movement possibly connected with the expectation of *Yueguang* is the rebellion of Hou Ziguang (317) in Gansu. However, the evidence is not conclusive. See above p. 107 and note 31.

and sectarian groups. The exact relationship between these different groups remains obscure, but they seem to have belonged to similar religious milieus; like the Daoist sects, they shared a common stock of beliefs and practices. The most characteristic features were vegetarianism, fasting rituals, and other forms of asceticism. Their leaders seem to have been mostly monks at the margins of the official Buddhist clergy.

The symbol of the Transformed City (*huacheng*), which in the *Zhengming jing* is used as a designation for the new world, likewise can be found in sources reporting religious rebellions. In the *Zhengming jing* the Transformed City is a transcendent world free of the conditions of life and death, which are the marks of *saṃsāra*. It has been noted that Faqing's adoption of the title *Dacheng* possibly referred to the hope of being guided to the heavenly paradise of the Transformed City. Two centuries after Faqing's rebellion, in 713, Wang Huaigu was executed because he had spread rumours about the coming of a new buddha and the appearance of a Silver City (*yincheng* 銀城).[149] The term "Silver City" without doubt refers to the Transformed City as depicted in the *Zhengming jing*. For the Transformed City is described as having towers and gates made of white silver.[150]

Wang Huaigu was active in Beizhou in Hebei province, the same region where as early as the end of the fifth century rebellions connected with the mythological themes Luminous King, Maitreya, Yueguang, and Transformed City are attested.[151] This regional concentration is certainly not accidental. These sects, which happened to be reported because they were involved in political actions, belonged to a regional tradition of messianic movements. It appears that this sectarian milieu was in some way related to the *Zhengming jing* or other scriptures of similar content. Thus, there is strong evidence that heterodox Buddhist sects which used certain apocryphal writings were transmitted in northeast China at least since the late fifth century. They are mentioned in the sources only because some of them were connected with rebellions.

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[149] For details see above p. 122.

[150] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1366a, lines 8–16.

[151] Wang Huiding (499), who called himself *ming fa huangdi* was active in Youzhou 幽州 (present Peking region), as was Liu Senshao (514), who had adopted the title *ming fa wang*. Faqing's rebellion (515) broke out in Jizhou and spread to Yingzhou 瀛州, the two districts in the south of Youzhou. Gao Tancheng (618), who called himself *dacheng huangdi*, was a man from Youzhou. Beizhou, where Wang Huagui (713) was active, is the district south of Jizhou.

However, we may assume that there were many other groups not involved in political activities. In any case, despite the persecution of millenarian rebellions, these sectarian traditions continued through the centuries, as the transmission of the *Zhengming jing* and *Shouluo jing* testifies.

That such sects were distinct social groups different from ordinary lay Buddhists as well as from orthodox clerics can be seen from some other sources. The *New History of the Tang Dynasty* has a short entry reporting that on the 17th day of the eleventh month of the year 715 an edict was issued prohibiting societies of people with white dress and long hair (*baiyi changfa hui* 白衣長髮會).[152] In the *Collection of Important Edicts of the Tang Dynasty* we find more details about this edict:

> There are [societies of people with] white dress and long hair who falsely claim that Maitreya has descended and been reborn [on earth]. Therefore they spread weird delusions and have gathered many followers. They falsely declare that they practise *dhyāna*-meditation [but in reality] they spread abstruse sayings of disasters and omens. Others fabricate mean *sūtras* (*xiao jing* 小經) which wrongly contain the phrase 'the Buddha said'. Or they train disciples and call themselves monks (*heshang* 和尚). Many of them do not take wives. Blinding and deluding the people in the neighbourhoods and streets, they gather many followers and severely undermine the public order. They [even] have district and county magistrates among their relatives who [accordingly] are negligent in their control. In this way immoral elements are bred. From today on it is imperative to increase arrests and furthermore the Surveillance Commissioners are ordered to investigate. If the district and county magistrates are not capable to discover them, they will be degraded together with their superiors.[153]

This edict was issued two years after the execution of Wang Huaigu, which shows that there were similar cases disquieting the authorities. Furthermore, it is evident that such movements were widespread and the local officials often ignored them. We may conclude that such sects usually did not cause any disturbances and the local magistrates preferred not to interfere to avoid unrest among the populace. A similar policy of local officials is well attested in the Qing dynasty. More important than the reactions of the authorities, however, is the information this

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[152] *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書, by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 and Song Qi 宋祁, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975, *j.* 5, p. 125.

[153] *Tang da zhaoling ji* 唐大照令集, by Song Minqiu 宋敏求, in *SKQS*, vol. 426, *j.* 113, 7b, p. 791b. The same edict is reported in *Cefu yuangui*, *j.* 159, p. 1923b.

edict provides about the beliefs and practices of the incriminated sectarian groups. They were sects that had their own apocryphal *sūtras* (*xiao jing*) teaching the coming of Maitreya. The leaders often were monks or at least claimed to be monks and lived a celibate life. Meditation seems to have been a prominent religious practice and they were engaged in preaching and propagating their religious beliefs. This all fits well with what we have observed above about the groups connected with apocryphal scriptures such as the *Zhengming jing*. There is one more detail deserving attention. The members of these sects are described as wearing white clothes and having long hair. The latter attribute sets them apart from ordinary Buddhist monks who shaved their heads. It is not clear whether those referred to in the edict as calling themselves monks also had long hair,[154] but in any case the majority of the sectarians did not shave their heads, although in other respects they shared many traits with Buddhist monks.

We do not know whether the white garments mentioned in the edict refer to a particular dress worn in rituals only or to an everyday dress used in the same way as the robes of Buddhist monks. In any case, white clothing was a distinctive mark of members of a sectarian Buddhist tradition that had already a long history when the edict was issued in 716. Several reports on sect-related incidents in the sixth and seventh centuries regard it as noteworthy that the sectarians wore white garments. In 681 a woman riding a white horse and wearing white dress stormed the bureau of the astrological service and asked questions about inauspicious omens.[155] Most conspicuous is the case of 610, when ten devotees of Maitreya wearing white caps and robes of white silk entered the capital and attempted an uprising.[156] As in the edict, the connection with beliefs in the coming of Maitreya is evident. Less evident it is in an earlier incident happening in 524 when two barbarian leaders in Wuchengjun (in eastern Shaanxi) propagated het-

[154] As we have seen above, in the *Zhengming jing* the ascetics, who were the most respected group and probably the sect leaders, are described as having shaved their head. Either the sects referred to in the edict were different in this regard, or long hair only refers to the majority of the ordinary sect members.

[155] *Jiu Tangshu*, *j.* 36, p. 1320. The White Horse symbolizes Buddhism based on an old legend that the first missionaries would arrive in China carrying Buddhist scriptures on a white horse (Forte, *Political propaganda*, p. 204, note 119). White horses are also mentioned in a rebellion of a Maitreya society in 880 (*Taiping guangji*, *j.* 289, p. 2302).

[156] *Suishu* 隋書, by Wei Zheng 魏徵, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973 (1982), *j.* 3, p. 74; *j.* 23, p. 662; see above p. 116.

erodox teachings and gathered a following to start a rebellion. Their followers were dressed in white cloth, holding white parasols and white banners.[157]

White clothes—the colour of mourning—were obviously an unusual habit, for otherwise historiographers would not have noticed it. The contexts suggest that it had some religious significance. Liu Ts'un-yan has treated this question and argued that white dress was a characteristic of Manichaeans.[158] It is, however, much more probable that the use of white robes had its origin in the Buddhist tradition. In the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra,* which had been translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva in the early fifth century, the term *baiyi* 白衣 or "White Clad Ones" (Sanskrit: *avadātavasana*) is used in the sense of lay devotee, that is, someone who has taken the vows for Buddhist lay believer without having been ordained as a monk or novice.[159] The scripture explains that there were different possibilities for the White Clad Ones. Besides the usual practice of taking the five vows of an *upāsaka* and observing them all time, it was possible to observe eight vows on the six fasting days each month.[160] As we have seen, keeping six fasting days each month is one of the practices praised in the *Zhengming jing*. The *Zhengming jing* refers to the White Clad Ones as a particular kind of devotee, different from both clerics and ordinary lay believers.[161] It seems that the White Clad Ones were lay devotees who did not content themselves with accepting the religious services of the monks but observed some or all of the ten basic rules for clerics without, however, having being ordained. The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* describes the pious layman Vimalakīrti as a model for this kind of lay devotee: "Although he was a White Clad One he observed the pure rules of conduct of the *śramaṇa.*"[162]

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[157] *Weishu, j.* 69, p. 1531.

[158] Liu Ts'un-yan, "Traces of Zoroastrian and Manichaean activities in pre-T'ang China," pp. 39–44.

[159] *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論 (T 1509), in *Taishō*, vol. 25, pp. 158c-161c. Cf. Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertue de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*, vol. 2, Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1949, pp. 819–847.

[160] *Dazhidu lun, j.* 13, p. 159b/c.

[161] *Zhengming jing*, p. 1364c lists "the White Clad Ones, clerics, and laypersons" (*baiyi dao su* 白依道俗). The character 依 should be read 衣. See also p. 1267a: After the descent of Maitreya all people will practice austerities and good deeds, "whether they have left their families or still live with their families, whether they belong to the White Clad Ones 白衣, to the clerics or to the laypersons." The *Shouluo jing* also refers to monks and White Clad Ones (p. 1356c).

[162] *Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所説經 (T 475), in *Taishō*, vol. 14, p. 539a.

Thus, wearing white clothes was a characteristic of Buddhist lay devotees (*upāsakas*) in India. In China, however, this habit seems to have been rather unusual. Although we cannot exclude that white robes were generally used in Buddhist lay communities following the Indian practice, the available evidence suggests that the practice prevailed in certain sectarian milieus where the expectation of Maitreya or some other saviour was popular. That the symbolism of white clothes was in some way related to prophecies about a future ruler may be one of the reasons that historiographers paid attention to this detail. Before the Sui dynasty unified the country in the late sixth century, there was a popular prophecy concerning a Son of Heaven with White Banner (*baiqi tianzi* 白旗天子) who would emerge from the region of Donghai 東海. This prophesied emperor was also called White Clad Son of Heaven (*baiyi tianzi* 白衣天子) and the Sui rulers therefore always wore white clothes.[163] Possibly they used this prophecy for propaganda reasons. Anyhow, it is clear that there was a connection between the symbol of white clothes and the expectation of a divine emperor or saviour. After the establishment of the Tang dynasty such popular prophecies were prohibited. As the edict of 715 shows, white clothes had become a distinctive feature of Maitreya sects. Although this does not permit the conclusion that all religious groups wearing white robes were Maitreya sects, lay communities of this sort seem to have occupied a position at the edges of orthodox Buddhism. As late as 1257 a White Clothes Society (*baiyi hui* 白衣會) was officially prohibited by emperor Lizong 理宗 of the Southern Song dynasty.[164]

Lay Buddhist communities

Lay Buddhism in medieval China had two main forms. On the one hand was the majority of the believers who were influenced by the diffused Buddhist tradition. They relied on the religious services of the monks, worshipped Buddhist divinities, and were inspired by Buddhist teachings of rebirth, salvation, hells, and paradises. Eschatological and millenarian expectations may at certain times have exerted a considerable influence on these ordinary believers. On the other hand were committed Buddhist lay devotees who had taken the vows of the *upāsakas*.

[163] *Da Tang chuangye qijuzhu* 大唐創業起居注, by Wen Daya 溫大雅, in *SKQS*, vol. 303, *j.* 1, 14b, p. 963a.

[164] *Songshi*, *j.* 44, p. 859.

They took the Buddhist religion much more seriously than ordinary believers, avoiding meat and wine, reciting *sūtras* or *dhāraṇīs*, and practising daily rituals. For them, following the Buddhist rules implied high moral standards. At least some, if not most of these lay devotees were organized in societies or communities. Possibly white ritual clothes were a common habit of such lay societies, possibly they were used only by certain communities belonging to particular traditions. In any case, the White Clad Ones and the other lay societies formed distinct religious organizations different from both the clerical order and the diffused Buddhism of the common believers.

Although Buddhist lay organizations were not part of the clerical order, they were in many ways related to it. Monks were the principal teachers of the Buddhist doctrine and they acted also as leaders of lay organizations. Buddhist monks were no homogeneous group. Only a minority belonged to the clerical establishment connected with the political and cultural elites. Among the others was a great variety of religious professionals, miracle workers, and ascetic recluses, and there were also monks critical of the official *saṃgha*. In most cases, the monks acting as teachers of laypersons probably were in good terms with the *saṃgha* since they secured the support of the population. On the other hand, charismatic monks could attain a considerable following and thus become religious leaders difficult to control by the clerical and political establishment.

One such case was the monk Miaoguang 妙光, who around the year 510 attracted a large following. He also produced a spurious *sūtra*. Miaoguang was expelled from the order and sentenced to death, but the sentence was reduced by the emperor to imprisonment.[165] He is called an "ascetic" (*toutuo daoren* 投陀道人)[166] and thus belonged to the class of religious virtuosos praised in the *Zhengming jing*. Miaoguang's case is exceptional as it is a rare example where we know the author of a spurious scripture. The fabrication of scriptures was not unusual, as the long lists of apocryphal writings in the Buddhist catalogues prove. Since composing *sūtras* was a task that could only be accomplished by authors familiar with Buddhist literature, we may be sure that most were written by monks. As in the case of Miaoguang's *sūtra*, many of these scriptures became a focus of worship, they were venerated as

[165] *Chu sanzang jiji*, *j.* 5, p. 40b/c. On Miaoguang cf. Strickmann, "The *Consecration Sūtra*," pp. 100–102; Tokuno, "The evaluation of indigenous scriptures," p. 38 f.

[166] The character 投 should be read 頭.

sacred texts with supernatural power.[167] The influence of such texts was considerable, much to the annoyance of the orthodox compilers of catalogues. It was, however, not the scriptures as such that disquieted the clerical establishment, but the following of devoted believers that they attracted. While monks probably played a leading role in the production and dissemination of apocrpyphical scriptures, the majority of the believers were certainly laypersons.

From the point of view of the clerical establishment, such religious groups were clearly heterodox as their scriptures were excluded from the canon. There were several reasons for their being regarded as heretical. One point was the outspoken criticism of the moral decadence of large parts of the Buddhist clergy and of the society as a whole. Some of the lay communities seem to have regarded themselves as the only true Buddhists in contrast to the majority of the monks who in their view followed the teachings of the Buddha only outwardly. The monks associated with these sects were obviously opposed to the clerical elites supported by the political authorities. Thus, the sects stood in tension to both the clerical and the political elites. The second point is the eschatological orientation of many of the popular sects and their scriptures. Although the expectation of an impending end of the present world dominated by the forces of evil may often not have been intense, as a latent belief it expressed in religious language a fundamental criticism of the prevailing conditions. In this sense it was a challenge to the existing political order. The third point that made the sects heretical was their being organizations uncontrolled by the state and the official clerical structures. This last point was particularly important to the political authorities since it implied the danger of organized opposition or even rebellion. The political and clerical elites were well aware of this danger as repeated allusions to historical precedents—particularly the Yellow Turban rebellion—testify.

From a doctrinal point of view, the emphasis on Buddhist morality and asceticism, which seems to have been a characteristic of many lay movements, could hardly be regarded as heterodox. Even the eschatological interpretation of history and the theory of the decline of the *dharma* were within the realm of orthodox Buddhism. From there, it was only a short step to Buddhist messianism with political ambitions. Still, only in the fifth and early sixth centuries and again during the

[167] Cf. Erik Zürcher, "Perspectives in the Study of Chinese Buddhism," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1982), pp. 161–176: 165–168.

turmoil of the change from the Sui to the Tang, Buddhist messianism erupted in violent actions. For the rest of the Tang dynasty no serious incidents of religious rebellions are reported. This is difficult to explain, the more so as we know that eschatological scriptures were widespread during the Tang dynasty. It seems that under the Tang the elites succeeded to a considerable degree in domesticating the latent messianic elements of the popular Buddhist tradition. This process can be described as the canonization of a Buddhist orthodoxy and its complement, the elimination of heterodoxy.

5. The Elimination of Heterodoxy

The fifth century saw quite a number of Buddhist inspired rebellions and the mushrooming of vegetarian societies, that is, Buddhist lay communities. This prompted the contemporary Lu Yuan to call to mind the historical precedent of the Yellow Turbans.[168] Being compared to the notorious Yellow Turbans was not only offensive; it was politically dangerous since it suggested that these Buddhist communities were a threat to the political order. Lu Yuan's allusions supported his view that these forms of Buddhism were heterodox movements that should be repressed and exterminated. Such implications could not be taken easily by the Buddhist *saṃgha*. For it depended on the economical and above all the political support of the ruling elites. Any suggestion that Buddhism might be connected with politically subversive movements endangered this support or could even provoke suppression and persecution. The Buddhist elites, therefore, had a vital interest in drawing a sharp line between themselves and the popular movements suspected of heterodoxy. In other words, it was necessary to define Buddhist orthodoxy in contrast to such heterodox movements.

As has been described above, critique of Buddhism as a heterodox religion had a certain tradition among Confucian scholars. In the fifth century, Daoism emerged as a religious rival to Buddhism competing for imperial favour. The fifth and the sixth centuries saw intense polemics between Buddhists and Daoists who mutually accused each other of being heterodox. The rivalry between the two religions continued during the Tang dynasty whose emperors usually favoured Daoism. How important the allusion to the Yellow Turbans was as a political argument

[168] See above p. 109.

reveals from the fact that Buddhist apologists repeatedly used it against Daoism. They argued that the Daoists only pretended to follow the teachings of Laozi, while in reality they continued the heretical tradition of the three Zhangs and the Yellow Turbans.[169] Given this climate of religious competition and mutual accusations of heterodoxy, defending Buddhist orthodoxy was a matter of immense political implications. It is against this background the monk Tanxuan 曇選 (531–625) admonished his disciples to refrain from gathering large followings of laypersons:

> The *buddhadharma* is slowly tortured to death. This is particularly because monks without virtue can incite laypersons, which provokes the danger of rebellion. If you gather crowds [of followers] it is impossible to instruct them in the principles of loyalty and faithfulness.
>
> Since the *buddhadharma* has spread in the East there have been many impostures. During a former dynasty there were the *Dacheng* bandits, nowadays there are the Maitreya heretics. People who deceive the ignorant are not isolated cases. I have heard that you have gathered crowds [of followers] and I am afraid that you will destroy our religion.[170]

Tanxuan is referring here to Faqing's Dacheng rebellion in 515 and to the heretical Maitreya belief of his own time. He had been witness of the attempted upheavals of the white clad Maitreyists in 610 and of Song Zixian in 613, which had happened in Gaoyang 高陽, Tanxuan's home district. When he warned his disciples against gathering large followings of laypersons, he was aware that only a short step separated orthodox Buddhism from heretical lay movements. Charismatic monks could all too easily turn into leaders of religious zealots prompting the authorities to take measures against the Buddhist community. Since under such conditions the political loyalty of the Buddhists would become questionable, the *buddhadharma* was in danger of being "slowly tortured to death," that is, suppressed by the state.

Thus, defending and defining Buddhist orthodoxy was not primarily a question of doctrinal purity but above all a political demand. Orthodoxy was defined as being supported by the political elites and the state. This implied the exclusion of those elements that were not acceptable to the official authorities and therefore repressed as heterodoxies. Only the elimination of elements suspected of heterodoxy

[169] Cf. *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (T 2060), *j.* 24, in *Taishō*, vol. 50, pp. 635b-636a; *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林, *j.* 53, p. 704c. Both sources refer to the seventh century.

[170] *Xu gaoseng zhuan, j.* 24, p. 641b/c.

could secure the privileged state of the *saṃgha*. This explains the deep distrust against charismatic leaders and popular religious movements, even if from the doctrinal point of view they may have been within the realm of Buddhist beliefs. It also explains the continuous attempts to purge the scriptural canon from writings that contained eschatological and millenarian teachings and prophecies. Fajing's *Zhongjing mulu*, which was published in 594, includes several such texts in his list of dubious scriptures. Fajing remarks:

> [These scriptures] all bear the mark of being contrary to what is genuine: some interpolate the golden words [of the Buddha] at the beginning and mention ballad prophecies at the end. Others first discuss worldly techniques but later attribute these to the words of the *dharma*. Still others draw upon *yin-yang* [cosmology] and good and bad omens, while others explain the fortune and misfortune [caused by] gods and spirits. It is apparent that all such [scriptures] are spurious and fallacious. It is fitting now that their [circulation] be halted, in order to save the world from their peril.[171]

Fajing attempts to characterize these heterodox scriptures as un-Buddhist as possible. He describes them as only outwardly Buddhist while in reality belonging to the popular traditions of wonderworkers and soothsayers. However, the texts to which he refers include several scriptures on the coming of Maitreya and the bodhisattva *Yueguang*. Some of them, which have been analysed above, without any doubt belong to the Buddhist tradition, even if the compilers of catalogues preferred to exclude them from the canon.

During the Sui dynasty, when Fajing wrote these comments, messianic prophecies were extremely popular. As we have seen, the Sui emperors attempted to channel such prophecies using them for their own political propaganda. At the same time, however, emperor Wendi (r. 589–604) was well aware of the political dangers of prophetic writings. In the *Da Tang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 (*Catalogue of Buddhist Scriptures Compiled during the Tang Dynasty*), which was published in 664, it is reported that Wendi ordered the compilation of a catalogue to scrutinize the spurious and false scriptures, which amounted to five-hundred scrolls, and had them all burned.[172] In 593 he decreed that even indi-

[171] *Zhongjing mulu* (T 2146), *j.* 2, p. 127c. Translation adapted from Tokuno, "The evaluation of indigenous scriptures," p. 41.

[172] *Da Tang neidian lu* (T 2149), *j.* 10, p. 333c.

viduals were not allowed to keep prophetic books.[173] Although the measure did not have a lasting effect, it shows that the elimination of heterodox scriptures was a matter of political significance.

The evolution of Buddhism in China was a process that saw the accumulation of an ever increasing number of scriptures. They reflected a great variety of different and even contradictory understandings of the Buddhist teaching. So different were the approaches that it became an intellectual challenge for Buddhist thinkers like Zhiyi 智顗 to develop theories to reconcile the teachings of the various scriptures and schools. From a doctrinal point of view, orthodox Buddhism was an all-encompassing tradition which allowed for the most diverse understandings and practices. In Mahāyāna Buddhism the concept of skilful means (*upāya-kauśalya*, chin. *fangbian* 方便) offered a theoretical justification for such diversity.[174] The diversity of Buddhist scriptures and practices was an expedient means to allow individuals of different capacities to find a suitable way to salvation. In this sense there was no need to exclude even the most distorted understanding of the Buddhist teachings from the realm of orthodoxy. Although the popular Buddhist sects may have held beliefs that overstressed and confused some aspects of the tradition, they still were part of this tradition and their followers were highly committed Buddhists. To regard them as heterodox was, therefore, not a judgement based on a canonized understanding of orthodox Buddhist beliefs, but rather a political verdict based on what the state accepted as tolerable forms of religious beliefs and practices. Thus, the formation of a Buddhist orthodoxy was a process by which the norms and values of the political elites were applied to the Buddhist traditions, accepting one part of it and excluding another.[175]

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[173] *Beishi* 北史, *j.* 11, p. 418.—These laws were continued in the Tang code, which became the basis of all law codes of the following dynasties. The mere possession of prophetic books, even if they were not used, was a criminal act and punishable. Cf. *Tanglü shuyi* 唐律疏議, by Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌, edited by Liu Junwen 劉俊文, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983,*j.* 18, pp. 345 f.

[174] For the concept of *upāya* in Mahāyāna Buddhism cf. Michael Pye, *Skilful means. A concept in Mahayana Buddhism*, London: Duckworth, 1978.

[175] Cf. Hubert Seiwert, "Orthodoxie, Orthopraxie und Zivilreligion im vorneuzeitlichen China," in *Gnosisforschung und Religionsgeschichte. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Kurt Rudolph*, edited by Holger Preißler and Hubert Seiwert, Marburg: Diagonal, 1994, pp. 529–541.

6. Conclusion: The Formation of Orthodoxies and Heterodoxies

By the Tang dynasty Buddhism and Daoism both had developed into state-supported orthodoxies. Competing for imperial support and privileges they were rivals; however, they had the common interest of maintaining and strengthening the political and cultural values of the elites on which they depended and to which their leaders belonged. In this respect they were allies of the Confucian literati and political elite who controlled the state affairs. The price to be paid for being accepted as orthodox teachings was dependence from the state and political control. But it meant also a certain distance to the grassroot levels of religion. To be sure, many Buddhist monks and Daoist priests served as mediators who propagated the values and world-views of the elites among the rural populace. In this capacity they were opposed to the popular cults and religious movements that deviated from the officially sanctioned norms and values. However, intellectual sophistication and political orthodoxy were not the primary demands of the common people. They hoped for redemption from concrete miseries, from physical illness, material suffering, and social injustice. To these needs responded the many healing cults, fortune-tellers, and shamans on the one hand, and the promises of a new dispensation offered by charismatic leaders on the other. On the popular level, religion was not an intellectual affair. Elements from different traditions were easily combined. On the grassroots, religious beliefs and symbols were not neatly classified as Buddhist or Daoist or according to any other scholarly orthodoxy, but rearranged according to the needs and understanding of the religious clientele. Here, Buddhist monks and Daoist priests had to compete with religious leaders who were not part of state-controlled clerical organizations.

Popular religion was an uncodified tradition of common lore, prophecies, local cults, and religious communities. With the rise of Buddhism, Buddhist symbols and notions deeply penetrated the religious life of all layers of society. Popular religion was no exception. Buddhist elements were adopted by charismatic leaders, shamans, and certainly also by charlatans. The end result was a popular religious tradition that shared with Buddhism many symbols and practices. However, the use of Buddhist beliefs and symbols was selective. Besides some basic Buddhist features as the belief in rebirth and afterlife, the veneration of buddhas and bodhisattvas, great weight was given to the eschatological elements

Buddhism had acquired during its development in China. These eschatological ideas were not of Buddhist but of Daoist origin. They were part of popular traditions even before they were reformulated in Buddhist terms.

One must resist the temptation, however, to put the popular religious groups and movements into one of the ready-made boxes by calling them either Buddhist or Daoist. These traditions had their own stock of beliefs, practices, and social organizations that cannot be simply regarded as depraved versions of Buddhism or Daoism. The actual situation was more complicated. Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, and popular traditions marked four focuses in the Chinese religious space. There was mutual influence and exchange between them. Not only did the orthodox traditions influence each other, they were also influenced by the popular traditions, which in turn adopted many elements from the orthodox religions. The religious life of the people manifested itself in a field of possibilities circumscribed by these four focuses. Within this field all graduations were possible.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to reconstruct the beliefs, organizational structure, and historical development of any of these popular groups in detail. All we know from the sources is that sectarian movements existed and that some of them were occasionally involved in rebellions. They were regarded, therefore, as heterodox by the political and clerical elites. We know that some beliefs were widespread; there were even scriptures to propagate them. However, individual sects appear in the sources as ephemeral phenomena. They are mentioned when involved in a rebellion, but disappear from the historical records immediately. Probably most of them were short-lived organizations. Sometimes skilled and charismatic leaders could attract a considerable following, but it does not seem that enduring organizations were build that lasted for decades or even centuries. Of course, we cannot definitely exclude that such organizations existed without having left any traces. However, what persisted through the centuries were presumably not close-knit communities but rather sectarian milieus. In these milieus, religious communities coalesced and dissolved, fused and split. They drew their inspiration from the vast stock of common beliefs and symbols, and depending on the emphasis they looked either more Buddhist or more Daoist.

Thus, below the level of orthodox, state-supported Buddhism and Daoism there existed a sectarian milieu that cannot simply be dismissed

as unsophisticated or misunderstood versions of Buddhism or Daoism. Even in medieval times we cannot reduce Chinese religion to the dichotomy of these two orthodox traditions. There were religious organizations independent of clerical and political supervision. They had distinct beliefs and sometimes their own scriptures, which were not accepted by the official religions. It is true that these beliefs and scriptures were heavily influenced by Buddhist and Daoist symbols and ideas, just like Buddhism and Daoism influenced each other. There were also many points of personal contact, as the involvement of monks shows. However, these popular sects were not controlled by the official *saṃgha.* They rather stood in opposition to the clerical establishment. Even if many sect members may have considered themselves as true Buddhists, if not the only true Buddhists, their communities were outside the realm of state-supported religions and considered heterodox.

The concepts of orthodoxy and heterodoxy are useful if we apply them to the legal and political status of religious communities. Evidently, we have no means to decide who were the true Buddhists or what were the correct interpretations of Buddhism or Daoism. We can see, however, that some religious organizations were supported by the political elites, while others were repressed. The issue of orthodoxy and heterodoxy was essentially a political one, since the standards of what was acceptable were defined primarily by political and not by clerical authorities. Certainly, there were internal differences and rivalries between the recognized religions, but as long as the state did not take side these were not matters of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. The question whether a certain teaching, ritual practice, or deity accorded with Buddhist or Daoist traditions usually did not concern the state. What mattered was rather the social impact of religious groups. The ruling elites were well aware that religious movements could turn into powerful political factors. The rebellion of the Yellow Turbans and the state of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect were historical paradigms that had established once for all the frame of reference in which popular religious movements were localized. Independent religious organizations that escaped political control were potential sources of social unrest and rebellion. They were outside the officially sanctioned social order, and hence heterodox.

To gain state support and the privileges of recognized religions, the Buddhist and Daoist clergy had to dissociate from heterodox groups. In this way Buddhism and Daoism were established as orthodox religions. However, since the distinction of orthodoxy and heterodoxy

reflects primarily a political judgment by the ruling elites, it had little significance in the minds of those who were attracted by certain religious beliefs and practices. From the Han dynasty on, religion developed its own dynamism of social organization. It was a social dynamism that went beyond the scope of the official social order, which was based on kinship, locality, and political hierarchy. Social groups and associations unified by religious beliefs and led by individuals who claimed authority independent of the established hierarchies, were by definition a challenge to the existing social and political order. Accordingly, the state was suspicious and attempted to repress these independent social forces, provided it was strong enough. If it was weak, as during the last decades of the Han dynasty, they could form powerful movements threatening the political order.

The transformation of Daoism and Buddhism into orthodox religions had the double aspect of state support and state control. The social dynamism of religious congregations was at least partially channelled into institutions that maintained close relations with the ruling elites. To some extent the formation of state-supported orthodoxies secured the domestication of otherwise unrestrained religious forces. However, it could not prevent religion to remain a factor of social self-organization. There were organized forms of religion that did not belong to the recognized religious bodies. They were voluntary societies based on religious beliefs. Neither their leaders nor the communities had a legal status within the official framework of Chinese society. Hence, they were illegal or heterodox religious organizations. Beginning in the Han dynasty, such heterodox sects were part of the Chinese religious landscape. Like the official traditions, they were exposed to many influences. They did, however, not form enduring organizations or a unified tradition but rather a sectarian milieu that time and again brought forth new religious congregations. However, the dichotomy between state-supported and state-controlled religions on the one hand and independent religious groups repressed by the state on the other persisted through the centuries.

CHAPTER FOUR

POPULAR SECTARIANISM DURING THE SONG AND YUAN DYNASTIES

After the decay of the Tang dynasty and the short-lived dynasties that followed it in the tenth century, the quest for orthodoxy gained new importance during the Song 宋 dynasty (960–1279). The three orthodox traditions all underwent significant changes during these centuries. In Confucianism, thinkers including Cheng Yi 程頤 (1032–1085) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) laid the ground for what should become the new Confucian orthodoxy. In Daoism the *Zhengyi* 正一 (Orthodox Unity) lineage of the Heavenly Masters was recognized by the Song emperors as the foremost tradition, which secured the Heavenly Masters an official position as heads of the Daoist religion in the South. In the North, which was ruled by the foreign Jin 金 dynasty (1115–1234), the *Quanzhen* 全真 (Complete Perfection) lineage founded by Wang Chongyang 王重陽 (1113–1169) represented a new form of Daoism advocating a synthesis of the Three Teachings and popularizing the *neidan* 內丹 practice of inner alchemy. Both the *Zhengyi* and the *Quanzhen* institutions continued to be supported by the following dynasties and thus became the orthodox versions of Daoism. Monastic Buddhism had to recover from the Huichang persecution (843–845), which had ended the golden age of Buddhist scholarship and greatly reduced the number of monks and monasteries. Buddhist scholars of the Song endeavoured to reassure the orthodox transmission of the teaching. Emissaries were sent to India, Korea, and Japan to collect again Buddhist scriptures, and works of historiography by Chan and Tiantai scholars reconstructed the lines of transmission to support their claim to orthodoxy.[1]

There is no need to consider further the development of the official traditions and the internal rivalries of different schools. Suffice it to note that the claim to orthodoxy on the one hand and the success in

[1] Cf. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer, *Die Identität der buddhistischen Schulen und die Kompilation buddhistischer Universalgeschichten in China* (Münchener Ostasiatische Studien; 26), Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1982.

establishing orthodoxy on the other were based on different principles. Internally, competing schools sustained their claims by referring to their alleged true understanding of the original teaching, which implied the degradation of heterodox teachings. We may quote by way of example from the *History of the Song Dynasty* where the Neo-Confucian (*daoxue* 道學) claim to represent the true form of Confucianism is supported:

> After the death of Confucius, his tradition was transmitted alone by Zengzi 曾子 who transmitted it to Zisi 子思 and to Mencius. After the death of Mencius it was not further transmitted. During the Han dynasty and thereafter, the Confucian scholars in their discussions of the Great *Dao* did not analyse it correctly and their descriptions were not accurate. Therefore, wrong and heterodox teachings (*yiduan xieshuo* 異端邪說) flourished and caused great damage. This went on for more than thousand years until the middle of the Song dynasty.[2]

Obviously, the argument reflects internal conflicts within the Confucian school. The Neo-Confucians had to defend their own position against the established Confucian orthodoxy. Even Zhu Xi, who later was exalted as the paragon of the new Confucian orthodoxy, had to face charges of spreading heterodox teachings, and the Neo-Confucian school suffered repeated persecutions during the Song dynasty.[3] Hence, claiming to represent orthodoxy was not the same as being recognized as orthodox. Ultimately, it was an external factor that decided which teachings were to be regarded as orthodox: official recognition and support by the emperor and the ruling elites. This was reached by the Neo-Confucians only towards the end of the Song and finally under the Yuan dynasty, when they rose to the position of state orthodoxy.

The example of Neo-Confucianism shows that competing claims of contending schools and their understanding of the teaching are only of secondary importance for the definition of orthodoxy. To succeed they had to find support and protection from the state. What was orthodox or heterodox was determined by the state as represented by the emperor. And since this decision deeply affected the social position and historical development of a teaching, internal conflicts and mutual

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[2] *Songshi* 宋史, *j.* 427, p. 12709 f.

[3] Cf. Carsun Chang, *The Development of Neo-Confucian Thought*, vol. 1, New York: College and University Press, 1963, p. 250 f; William Theodore DeBary, *Neo-Confucian orthodoxy and the learning of the Mind-and-Heart*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1981, pp. 16 f.

charges of heterodoxy always had to bear in mind possible reactions of the government. Hence, the claim to orthodoxy was not only a matter of intellectual debate, but at the same time a contest for political privileges and influence. This applied to the conflicts between rivalling schools within the same traditions not less than to the disputes between the various traditions. The rivalries between Buddhists and Daoists would have been superfluous, had they had no bearing on imperial privileges and support.

The concept of orthodoxy is, therefore, ambiguous. Depending on the context it refers either to the self-understanding of certain religious groups in contrast to others, or to the recognition of religious institutions by the state. It is only in the latter sense that *orthodoxy* can be applied as an analytical concept by historians of religion. For we may possibly find out whether a given religious group was recognized and supported by the state, while it is impossible to decide whether it represents the correct interpretation of a religious tradition. The same applies to the concept of heterodoxy. Charges of heterodoxy and claims to orthodoxy could be made by any religious group, but they gained social and political significance only if they were backed by the politically powerful.

During the Song dynasty a number of new religious movements evolved that soon were accused of heterodoxy. Some of them can be regarded as continuations of older popular traditions whose heterodox character was established since centuries. They continued messianic beliefs in the advent of Maitreya and were organized as popular sects without close contact to the established Buddhist or Daoist clergy. As such they represent a link between medieval popular sectarianism and certain popular sects of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Other new religious movements of the Song were closer to official Buddhism. The founders of two of them, the White Cloud (*Baiyun* 白雲) and the White Lotus (*Bailian* 白蓮) traditions, were Buddhist monks whose teachings did hardly depart from the doctrines of orthodox Buddhism. However, since they were accused of heterodoxy and their movements later merged with other popular traditions, they may likewise be considered to be forerunners of the Ming and Qing sects. A third tradition deserving mentioning in this context is Manichaeism. During the Song and Yuan dynasties Manichaean communities flourished in south-east China and it may well be that elements of Manichaean beliefs were adopted by other popular religious movements and thus influenced the Ming and Qing sects. Incidentally, all four types of religious movements just

mentioned are explicitly listed in the Ming law against heterodox sects, which was promulgated in 1370 immediately after the founding of the dynasty: Maitreya messianism, White Lotus, White Cloud, and Manichaeism.[4] Since the same law was later included in the Qing code, these four traditions were the legal paradigms of heterodox religious movements for more than five hundred years. They all can be traced back to the Song dynasty.

The religious movements of the Song and Yuan dynasties have already been studied by many scholars, and it is therefore not necessary to treat this subject in great detail. I will rather summarize the main findings of earlier research paying particular attention to the charges of heterodoxy. It will be argued that accusations of heterodoxy reflect the endeavour of clerical elites to defend their own influence and privileges, and of political elites to restrain popular religious groups perceived as seedbeds of social dissent and rebellion. In both cases the distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy is primarily a political one that classifies religions as legal or illegal. While the motives of the clerical and political elites were different, they coincided in the attempt to repress religious movements that developed outside the framework of state controlled institutions.

1. Popular Buddhism and Buddhist Sectarianism

From the early medieval ages, orthodox Buddhism was not confined to the monastic institutions. Lay devotees organized collective religious activities such as financing the construction of temples and works of art and the copying of Buddhist scriptures. The commitment of lay believers was indispensable to sustain the *saṃgha* of monks and nuns materially. It allowed the lay believers to gain merits through their donations to the *saṃgha*. The monks in turn were enabled to live a religious life and perform rituals, and in this way to gain merits that could be transferred to the laypersons. There was thus an exchange relationship where the lay believers provided material support to the monks who returned religious merits. Another type of religious association emphasized devotion to a particular buddha, particularly Maitreya and Amitābha, and the wish to be reborn in Tuṣita heaven or the

[4] *Ming lü lijie fuli* 明律集解附例, *j.* 11, 9b, Taibei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1969 (Falü congshu 法律叢書; 1), vol. 3, p. 932.

Western Paradise. The paradigm of this type of lay community was the religious community founded by the famous monk Huiyuan 慧遠 in 402 on Mount Lu 廬山 in Jiangxi, which allegedly was called White Lotus Society (*Bailian she* 白蓮社).[5] The custom to form religious societies was widespread also during the Tang dynasty.[6] Although these societies were not part of the monastic institutions and the members were mostly laypersons, they usually retained intimate connections with monks who acted as spiritual leaders. During the Song famous monks founded religious associations that sometimes amounted to more than ten thousand members. Following Huiyuan's example, some of these societies were called White Lotus Society (*Bailian she*).[7] There were, however, also other names, such as Pure Land Society (*Jingtu she* 淨土社). They differed considerably in size, ranging from groups of some hundred members to huge gatherings of tens of thousands. Although their internal organization appears to have been weak, the mobilization of large numbers of devotees testifies the great support monastic Buddhism received from the population.[8]

While most religious associations were founded and dominated by monks, this appears not to have always been the case. Zanning 贊寧 (919–1002?), one of the leading monks of the early Song who held the position of Supervisor of the *Saṃgha* (*senglu* 僧錄),[9] complained that the practice to form White Lotus Societies was sometimes corrupted by people who knew nothing about the Buddhist teaching but followed Daoist ideas. In his view the members of theses societies practised heterodox methods, which was a cause of great concern to him. His short remark shows that the spectrum of religious societies was broad

[5] On the tradition that the community was called "White Lotus Society" see Daniel Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist religion. Dissenting sects in late traditional China* (Harvard East Asian Series; 83), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 221, note 46.

[6] For Buddhist lay organizations cf. Kenneth K.S. Ch'en, *The Chinese transformation of Buddhism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973, pp. 281–303; Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄, *Jianming Zhongguo Fojiao shi* 簡明中國佛教史, Shanghai: Zewen chubanshe, 1986, pp. 138–140, 196–201.

[7] *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統記, by Zhipan 志磐 (T 2035), in *Taishō*, vol. 49, pp. 277a (for Zhili 知裡), 277b (for Benru 本如).

[8] For details about Buddhist societies of the Song cf. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist religion*, pp. 86–89; B.J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings in Chinese religious history* (Sinica Leidensia; 26), Leiden: Brill, 1992, pp. 28–31.

[9] For Zanning's biography see Schmidt-Glintzer, *Die Identität der buddhistischen Schulen*, pp. 8–10.

and not all of them were under the control of orthodox monks.[10] Zanning was particularly sensitive to heterodox tendencies since as Supervisor of the *Saṃgha* he was responsible for guaranteeing Buddhist orthodoxy and maintaining good relations with the state.

One type of lay community that differed considerably from the traditional associations led by monks were groups called *daomin* 道民, which is commonly translated as "People of the Way".[11] They were active mainly in the south-eastern province of Zhejiang. Barend ter Haar describes these groups, which are mentioned in the sources from the twelfth century on, as an "activist" type of lay Buddhism.[12] They collected merit similar to other lay societies by reciting *sūtras* or having them printed, and they also contributed to the welfare of the society by building bridges and roads. Such activities were appreciated by many people and secured them a generally respected position. Although they occasionally cooperated with Buddhist monasteries, they represented a new type of lay Buddhists. The People of the Way formed communities independent of the clerical establishments of orthodox Buddhism. They maintained their own cloisters as the base of their religious and social activities. The heads of these cloisters were not monks but laypersons who were married and remained integrated in the ordinary society. However, they took on the religious roles and functions of monks and thus were different from common lay devotees. The members of these groups had a strong self-awareness as religious persons who realized Buddhist ideals of life without being monks, but with a higher religious commitment than ordinary believers. Affiliation to these communities seems to have been a formal act, as is suggested by the adoption of a religious name. According to ter Haar's research, the religious affiliation of the People of the Way was easily recognized since they always used certain characters as the first part of the name.[13]

The religious groups called People of the Way seem to have been organized only on a local base without forming larger organizations.

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[10] Zanning, *Jieshe fa jiwen* 結社法集文, in *Lebang wenlei* 樂邦文類, by Zongxiao 宗曉 (T 1969), in *Taishō*, vol. 47, p. 177b.

[11] For a detailed discussion of the People of the Way cf. Barend J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings in Chinese religious history* (Sinica Leidensia; 26), Leiden: Brill, 1992, pp. 31–43. In the following I summarize ter Haar's research.

[12] Ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, p. 39.

[13] Cf. ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings,* pp. 39–41. Ter Haar lists six such religious "affiliation characters": Dao 道, Zhi 智, Yuan 圓, Pu 普, Miao 妙 and Jue 覺.

Ter Haar underlines that they were usually well integrated and accepted members of the society who often cooperated in their social activities with monks, other lay Buddhists, officials, and even members of the imperial clan.[14] Yet, since individual communities were independent of each other and there was no central authority controlling or supervising their activities, such religious groups could easily develop their own dynamics of development. We have, therefore, to be cautious in generalizing. In western Zhejiang province, groups of People of the Way were active not only in the urban areas but also in the villages where there were less opportunities to interact with the clerical and political elites. It is not beyond imagination that some of these groups developed sect-like structures that made them appear less integrated in the surrounding society. In a memorial of 1198 the People of the Way are described as "Vegetarian Devil Worshippers" (*chicai shimo* 喫菜事魔), which was a common designation for illegal popular sects. While this formulation may be a stereotype, other information is added suggesting that the groups described were indeed different from the activist type of lay Buddhist described above. According to this account, they separated from the ordinary society and "formed a clan of their own." Being neither monks nor Daoist priests they had, however, no wives and children and abstained from eating *hun*[15] food and alcohol. To do meritorious deeds they built shrines and temples and repaired bridges. Their congregations were organized on a local base with a leader each. Normally they lived an idle life, but they held public gatherings under the name of Incense Burning (*shaoxiang* 燒香), Lamp Lightening (*randeng* 燃燈), Fasting (*shezhai* 設齋) or *Sūtra*-Recitation (*songjing* 誦經), with hundreds or thousands of attendants who suddenly assembled and quickly dispersed again. The text goes on blaming them for bullying the local population to collect money.[16]

These groups were certainly more than just congregations of activist lay Buddhists engaged in charitable activities. What is described here are well-organized sects maintaining a strong sense of clannishness and to some extent separated from ordinary society. While the memorial tries to depict them in very dark colours, it remarks that they generally enjoyed the respect and support of the local population because their

[14] Ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, p. 42.

[15] *Hun* 葷 food includes meat and certain strong smelling vegetables like onions.

[16] *Song huiyao jigao* 宋會要輯稿, Taibei: Xin wen feng chubanshe, 1976, *j.* 165, 130a/b.

activities were welcome. Since they had no wives and children, they seem to have formed celibate communities, although they were not considered monks. This suggests that the People of the Way depicted here were different from the married lay Buddhists who used the same name. Four years later, in 1202, another memorial describes activities of the People of the Way in very similar language. In this case the author implies that they belonged to the White Cloud movement.[17] It is tempting to suppose that the celibate People of the Way of the 1198 memorial were likewise followers of the White Cloud.[18] However, it may well be that the later memorial of 1202 echoes the earlier one just because both groups were called People of the Way. We cannot be sure that all groups using this name or to which this name was applied by outsiders were of the same type. Remember Zanning's complain that some so-called Buddhist associations should in fact be considered heterodox groups since they departed from Buddhism. Although Zanning refers to the tenth century, we have no reason to suppose that the situation was very different during the Southern Song dynasty. As we shall see later, there were certainly popular religious groups in southern China that had little in common with those People of the Way who enjoyed the support of officials and literati. Even if we assume that some officials were notoriously critical of any kind of popular religious group, it has to be noted that by the thirteenth century some groups called People of the Way caused official suspicion and demands of punishment and prohibition.

Judging from the memorials, it does not seem that the cause of official concern was departure from orthodox Buddhist beliefs. Nothing suggests that the memorialists cared about doctrinal orthodoxy, and what they write about the religious practices of these People of the Way contains nothing that differed markedly from what other lay Buddhist groups practised. The sole exception is the remark "they eat vegetables and worship the devil" to which the memorial of 1202 adds the likewise stereotypical formula "they gather at night and disperse at dawn while men and women are not separated." Although it cannot

[17] Cf. *Shimen zhengtong* 釋門正統, by Zongjian 宗鑒, *j.* 4, 413a/c, in *WXZJ*, vol. 130, pp. 825a-826a, partly translated in Daniel L. Overmyer, "The White Cloud sect in Sung and Yüan China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 42 (1982), pp. 615–642: 633. A shorter version of the memorial is quoted in *Fozu tongji*, *j.* 48, pp. 830a-831b.

[18] On the question whether the name People of the Way generally refers to the White Cloud Tradition cf. ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, pp. 32–37. Ter Haar denies an identity, but admits that historical evidence is inconclusive.

be doubted that these formulations are stereotypes[19] that should not be taken at face value, they reveal in which way the groups were perceived by officials. They obviously did not regard them as ordinary lay Buddhist associations but classified them as heterodox groups. The stumbling block was not their teachings but their organization. These were well-organized communities outside the structure of ordinary society and the control of the *saṃgha*. Their members were no kin to each other, but behaved like belonging to the same family. They had local leaders whose position was not legitimate, and they maintained networks capable of mobilizing large numbers of people. The structure of these networks was obscure to the officials, for the gatherings seemed to occur suddenly and could not be anticipated. What made these groups particularly alarming was that common people were attracted by their activities, which implied that they may gain even more adherents. Hence, they represented an effective form of social organization escaping the control of the authorities.

The memorial of 1198 states that these People of the Way did not take wives and had no children, which offended the moral obligation to produce offspring since they were neither Buddhist nor Daoist monks or novices. This suggests that at least the core of these communities consisted of people living a celibate life like monks. They were, however, not officially ordained and had no certificates. Since it is not stated that they shaved their heads or wore the robes of clerics, it does not seem that they pretended to be Buddhist monks. We must conclude that these communities were different from ordinary Buddhist lay communities under the leadership of monks. They were new religious communities outside the common social structure for which no legal status existed. Given the high degree of legal norms regulating the religious life of the Buddhist and Daoist clergy,[20] these religious organizations clearly offended the legal order and it is, therefore, not surprising that they were considered illegal. From this point of view they were heterodox religious groups that should be suppressed to secure the social order. The 1202 memorial is very clear in this respect stating that the People of the Way violate state laws. It compares them to the

[19] For the use of these stereotypes cf. ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, pp. 44–55.

[20] Cf. Werner Eichhorn, *Beitrag zur rechtlichen Stellung des Buddhismus und Taoismus im Sung-Staat*, Leiden: Brill, 1968, which is a translation of regulations concerning Buddhist and Daoist clerics in the *Qingyuan tiaofa shilei* 慶元條法事類 (*Classified laws of the Qingyuan era*).

Wudoumi (Five Pecks of Rice), that is, the Daoist movements of the late Han dynasty that grew to a mass movement finally destroying the dynasty.[21]

The charge of heterodoxy as applied by officials and state law was primarily based on political considerations. No attempts were made to define heterodoxy in terms of Buddhist doctrine, but only with reference to the hazards caused by this kind of illegal organization. Since the officials did not care much about religious contents but classified religious groups according to legal and political criteria, we cannot be sure that they clearly distinguished between different kinds of them. It must, therefore, remain open whether the People of the Way described in the memorial of 1198 represented the same tradition as the People of the Way of the 1202 memorial. In this latter case, it clearly refers to a community of the White Cloud tradition whose leader Shen Zhiyuan 沈智元 had requested that a White Cloud Cloister (Baiyun an 白雲菴) be granted an official name plaque. This would have made his establishment a legal one, which the memorialist strongly opposed. He complains that such cloisters were supported by the wealthy and powerful and therefore spared from official investigations.

The White Cloud movement

The sources describe the White Cloud movement as a very popular religious movement with its own cloisters that were clearly seen as different from the temples and monasteries of orthodox Buddhism. It is useful, therefore, to consider shortly the history of this movement. Even in the earliest historical account the White Cloud movement is mentioned in one breath not only with the People of the Way, but also with the White Lotus movement. Zongjian 宗鑑, the compiler of the *Shimen zhengtong* (*Orthodox Transmission of the Buddhist Schools*), remarks that the main distinction between White Cloud and White Lotus followers was whether they took wives or not, apparently implying that the White Cloud people did not.[22] Zongjian probably refers to the

[21] *Shimen zhengtong, j.* 4, 413b (*WXZJ*, vol. 130, p. 825a).

[22] *Shimen zhengtong, j.* 4, 412c (*WXZJ*, vol. 130, p. 824a). In fact, it is not clear from the text which of the two traditions Zongjian meant as promoting celibacy. The available sources show that both had followers who were monks (whether regularly ordained or not) as well as laypersons.

situation in his own lifetime, the early thirteenth century.[23] This was roughly a century after the death of Kong Qingjue 孔清覺, the founder of the White Cloud sect. Qingjue (1043–1121) was a regular monk who popularized his own version of Buddhism in the Hangzhou region. His teachings were based on Tiantai philosophy and strongly influenced by Confucian morality. It does not seem that they departed from Buddhist doctrinal orthodoxy.[24] The role of a Buddhist teacher addressing both monks and lay devotees was nothing unusual. Within the Buddhist *saṃgha* teacher-disciple relationships were the rule, and monks who organized the numerous religious gatherings naturally acted as teachers to lay people. Qingjue was one of the more appealing of these teachers, for he attracted many followers who became known as "White Cloud Vegetarians" (*Baiyun cai* 白雲菜) or "Ten Stages Vegetarians" (*Shidi cai* 十地菜). The latter name refers to his teaching of a gradual path to salvation in ten stages, the former to the name of his cloister. It appears that his success in gaining followers was not apprized by all of his fellow monks, for he was denounced by one of them to the authorities and banished.[25]

According to Zongjian, the reason for this opposition were doctrinal differences. Qingjue is said to have offended the Chan school, an information repeated by Zhipan 志磐.[26] Since Qingjue was banished, this would imply that the authorities intervened in doctrinal disputes of the Buddhist *saṃgha*, which is not very believable. It is more probable that Qingjue was accused of offending state laws, as is reported in a later biography.[27] We can only guess that he was possibly charged of having violated some of the numerous rules regulating monastic life.[28] What is clear, however, is that Qingjue's White Cloud community was not undisputed in clerical circles. Being a successful teacher who gained many followers may have caused the envy of other monks who were jealous of his fame and public support. On the other hand, Qingjue

[23] For the history of the *Shimen zhengtong* cf. Schmidt-Glintzer, *Die Identität der Buddhistischen Schulen*, pp. 83 f, 96.

[24] For Qingjue's biography and teachings cf. Overmyer, "The White Cloud sect," pp. 620–631.

[25] *Shimen zhengtong*, *j.* 4, 412d-413a (*WXZJ*, vol. 130, pp. 824b-825a).

[26] Cf. *Fozu tongji*, *j.* 26, p. 419b/c; *j.* 55, pp. 479c-480a.

[27] *Shishi jigu lüe* 釋氏稽古略, by Jue'an 覺岸 (T 1037), *j.* 4, in *Taishō*, vol. 49, p. 886a, translated in Overmyer, "The White Cloud sect," p. 623.

[28] These rules regulated so many details of monastic life that we must suppose that they were often infringed; cf. Eichhorn, *Beitrag zur rechtlichen Stellung*.

appears to have been rather critical of his fellow monks and the state of the *saṃgha*. In his scriptures he takes up the idea of the final period of the *dharma* (*mofa*). Although he does not use the expression, he obviously refers to it when he talks about the time after the destruction of the true *dharma* (*zhengfa*) and the semblance *dharma* (*xiangfa*). In this final period, heretical and arrogant monks will be in power. Qingjue leaves no doubts that he considers the *saṃgha* of his own time to be in the corrupted state of the final period of the *dharma*, for he addresses his critics: "You are ignorant monks, surely the worst of the four classes of men. If you do not believe in the three vehicles and the ten stages you shall be in purgatory for two hundred myriads of *kalpas*."[29]

Although Qingjue refers to the twentieth chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* as authority, these views evidently reverberate descriptions of the final period of the *dharma* as found in the *Sūtra on the Extinction of the Dharma* (*Fa miejin jing*) and the apocryphal *Sūtra Removing Doubts about the Semblance Dharma* (*Xiangfa jueyi jing*).[30] Like some monks of the sixth century, Qingjue used these beliefs to censure the state of the *saṃgha* and to criticize other monks. The implication is that his own version of Buddhism is the correct understanding of the *dharma*, while his critics are heretics who distort the true teachings. One can easily imagine that a teacher holding such views met with sharp resistance among the clerical community. Since Qingjue had a following of both lay believers and monks, his White Cloud movement represented a challenge to orthodox Buddhism threatening the unity of the *saṃgha*. It was a schismatic movement and thus can properly be called a "sect".

To which extent this Buddhist sect remained affiliated to the official *saṃgha* is difficult to say. Many of Qingjue's disciples were monks, and this would have made it possible to ordain new monks according to *vinaya* rules. On the other hand, the number of ordinations was rigidly restricted by state law, which made it almost impossible for a community of monks to grow in number. Hence, we must suspect that the expansion of the White Cloud movement was not based on legally ordained monks, but mainly on members who just assumed the role of monks. This corresponds to the statement of the 1202 memorial that followers of the White Cloud were neither Buddhist nor Daoist monks or novices. Nevertheless, the movement continued to be supported by monks who

[29] *Chu xue ji* 初學記, by Qingjue 清覺, in *WXZJ*, vol. 112, p. 451d, translation by Overmyer, "The White Cloud sect," p. 632.

[30] Cf. above p. 130.

sometimes took leading roles. After the Mongol Yuan 元 dynasty (1279–1368) had succeeded the Song dynasty, the White Cloud movement was legally recognized in 1279 and the monk Dao'an 道安 (fl. 1240–1281) appointed as supervisor of its monks (*senglu*). However, in the early fourteenth century a layperson, Shen Mingren 沈明仁, was bestowed the title "General Overseer of the White Cloud School" (*Baiyunzong zongshe* 白雲宗總攝). Shen Mingren is called a "White Cloud monk" (*Baiyun seng*) in one source, and it is stated that he illegally ordained more than 4.800 monks.[31] Zhipan gives the additional information that these were "monks with hair,"[32] which shows that they did not belong to the Buddhist clergy. On the request of a censor the community was declared illegal in 1319 and dissolved. Thereafter, the White Cloud movement disappeared from historical records.[33]

The White Cloud tradition appears as a hybrid form of monastic and lay Buddhism. Founded by a regular monk it soon developed its own form of organization independent of the Buddhist *saṃgha*. It was supported by influential lay people and some monks, but apparently stood in high tension to the Buddhist clerical establishment. Although government officials and eminent monks occasionally criticized the movement, its expansion does not seem to have been impeded by state laws. In the early fourteenth century it had a following of tens of thousands and maintained more than fifty monasteries and cloisters in northern Zhejiang and southern Jiangsu.[34] The heads of these communities were often laypersons,[35] and it appears that the position was hereditary. Shen Mingren, the head of the movement in 1315, could well be a descendant of Shen Zhiyuan who in 1202 is mentioned as leader of a White Cloud community. In any case, Shen Mingren is described as an extremely wealthy sect leader who had amassed land and money from his followers and obtained an official title through bribery.[36] This foreshadows a role pattern well-attested during the Ming and Qing dynasties. As we shall see below, sect leadership was usually

[31] *Yuanshi* 元史, by Song Lian 宋濂, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976, *j.* 26, p. 593.

[32] *Fozu tongji*, *j.* 48, p. 436a, translated in Overmyer, "The White Cloud sect," p. 638.

[33] Available evidence of the White Cloud movement during the Yuan dynasty is discussed in Overmyer, "The White Cloud sect," pp. 635–639.

[34] Overmyer, "The White Cloud sect," p. 639.

[35] Ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, p. 36.

[36] *Yuanshi*, *j.* 26, pp. 591 f.

transmitted within family lines and often allowed to accumulate considerable fortunes. It was not uncommon to use this wealth to purchase offices and in this way obtain a legally recognized social status.

The White Lotus movement

The White Cloud movement was not the only Buddhist sect of this kind. As Zongjian observed, very similar to it were the White Lotus people. As founder of the White Lotus movement he names Mao Ziyuan 茅子元 (ca. 1086–1166), a younger contemporary of Kong Qingjue.[37] Like the latter, Mao Ziyuan was a monk who made himself a name as teacher to both laypeople and fellow monks. His followers became known as *Bailian cai* 白蓮菜 (White Lotus Vegetarians). The name White Lotus was, as has been mentioned above, rather common for Buddhist associations since it alluded to the paradigm of Huiyuan's White Lotus Society. However, in the thirteenth century the Tiantai historiographers Zongjian and Zhipan evidently used the name for the particular tradition traced back to Ziyuan. Although Mao Ziyuan shared the affiliation to the Tiantai tradition with the two Buddhist historians, they both classify his White Lotus movement together with the White Cloud sect as heterodox. It appears that Ziyuan faced similar problems as Qingjue because he was a successful teacher and surpassed many of his fellow monks in fame. In any case, like Qingjue he was indicted to the authorities on the charge of worshipping devils.[38] This stereotype is certainly not to be taken literally but implies that his community was compared to popular religious groups commonly characterized as "Vegetarian Devil Worshippers". Ziyuan was banished to another place where he continued preaching and attracted even more followers. According to tradition he also impressed local officials, for his fame as teacher was reported to the throne. In response emperor Gaozong 高宗 honoured him with the title "Mentor of the Lotus School, Compassion-Displaying School Head" (*Lianzong daoshi Cizhao zongzhu*

[37] For Mao Ziyuan's biography and the history of the White Lotus movement during the Song and Yuan dynasties see Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist religion,* pp. 89–98; ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings,* pp. 65–113.

[38] *Shimen zhengtong, j.* 4, 412d-413a (*WXZJ,* vol. 130, pp. 824b-825a); *Fozu tongji, j.* 47, p. 425a, *j.* 54, p. 475a.

蓮宗導師慈照宗主) and invited him in 1166 to lecture on the Pure Land teaching. He died in the same year.[39]

If this tradition were reliable, it would imply that Mao Ziyuan died as a religious teacher highly respected and honoured by the emperor. It is difficult to imagine that such a man could be half a century later described without further comment as a heretic who was banished for worshipping the devil. I suppose, therefore, that the tradition about Ziyuan's lecturing before emperor Gaozong is a pious legend invented by his followers to defend the White Lotus movement against charges of heterodoxy.[40] Be that as it may, Ziyuan became the founder of a dynamic religious movement that included both laypersons and monks. His teachings were based on the Pure Land tradition. He stressed the practice of *nianfo*[41] 念佛 as a means to attain enlightenment and to experience the Pure Land in one's own mind.[42] While devotion to the

[39] *Lushan Lianzong baojian* 廬山蓮宗寶鑑, by Pudu 普度 (T 1973), *j.* 4, in *Taishō*, vol. 47, p. 326a.

[40] The earliest reference to Mao Ziyuan being honoured by the emperor is found in the *Lichao shishi zijian* 歷朝釋氏資鑒, by Xizhong 熙仲, *j.* 11, 108a/b, in *WXZJ*, vol. 132, p. 215, which was completed in 1275. According to this source, Mao Ziyuan was invited to the Deshou Dian 德壽殿 palace in 1133. As Wang Jianchuan has shown, this cannot be true (Wang Jianchuan 王見川, *Cong Monijiao dao Mingjiao* 從摩尼教到明教, Taibei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1992, pp. 290–291). The *Lidai Shishi zijian* also relates that Ziyuan converted seventy thousand monks, which is a number that puts the memorial quoted into the realm of legends. Another date for Ziyuan's meeting with the emperor is given by Pudu (*Lushan Lianzong baojian*, T 1973, *j.* 4, p. 326a). He states that emperor Gaozong 高宗 invited Ziyuan in the second year of the Qiandao era (1166). However, emperor Gaozong retired in 1162 (*Songshi*, *j.* 32, p. 611). It is doubtful whether after his retirement he was ritually entitled to confer new honorary titles to Huiyuan and Mao Ziyuan, as Pudu claims in a letter dated 1310 with the obvious intent of proving the orthodoxy of the movement (reprinted in Yang Ne, ed. 楊訥, *Yuandai Bailian jiao ziliao huibian* 元代白蓮教資料彙編, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1989, p. 178). In any case, the two divergent accounts of the *Lidai Shishi zijian* and the *Lushan Lianzong baojian* show that the tradition was not based on unambiguous sources.— Incidentally, a similar legend was also current about the Ming sect founder Luo Menghong who according to later traditions was invited to lecture before the emperor and was bestowed a honorary title. Cf. below p. 218.

[41] *Nianfo* is conventionally translated as "reciting the name of the Buddha". As explained by Pudu, who explicitly refers to Mao Ziyuan, it should not be misunderstood as mechanical repetition of Amitābha's name but as a concentration of the mind on Amitābha's Pure Land, which presupposes the will to be reborn there. Entering the Pure Land is finally understood as enlightenment through which the Pure Land is found in one's own mind. It is not to be sought somewhere outside. Cf. *Lushan Lianzong baojian* (T 1973), *j.* 7, pp. 335c-336a.

[42] Cf. *Cizhao zongzhu nianfo ren fayuan ji bing xu* 慈照宗主念佛人發願偈并序 (*The gāthā and the preface of the Compassion-Displaying School Head* [i.e., Ziyuan] *on* nianfo *and*

Buddha Amitābha without doubt was a central element of the religious practice, Ziyuan's teachings were more than just promoting popular Buddhist piety and recitation of the Buddha's name. From a doctrinal point of view, these teachings were not heterodox and Ziyuan accordingly was highly respected in the later Pure Land tradition of the Ming and Qing dynasties.[43] One wonders, therefore, why Zongjian and Zhipan, the Buddhist historiographers of the late Song, considered his White Lotus tradition as a heterodox movement.

Unfortunately, there is little information about the development of the White Lotus movement in the decades after Mao Ziyuan's death. Zongjian remarks that leadership of parts of the community was taken over by someone called "Younger Master Mao" (*Xiao Mao sheli* 小茅闍黎) who did, however, not reach a similar position as Mao Ziyuan.[44] We know from the much better documented sects of the Ming and Qing dynasties that after the death of a charismatic founder it is often difficult to keep the movement together. It was rather common that sects split into several branches under various leaders or disintegrated into smaller locally based groups. This seems to have happened with Mao Ziyuan's White Lotus movement. There is no evidence whatsoever that it survived as a unified organization with a generally recognized central leadership. It rather appears that there were numerous groups considering themselves to be part of Mao Ziyuan's White Lotus tradition. Since the names White Lotus and Lotus School (*Lianzong* 蓮宗) were older than Mao Ziyuan's movement and commonly used within the Pure Land tradition, it is difficult to clearly identify these groups unless there is further reference to Ziyuan.[45] On the other hand, it cannot be doubted that the movement was very popular in the region of northern Zhejiang and Jiangxi in the thirteenth century.

Barend ter Haar has traced the history of the White Lotus movement during the late Song and Yuan dynasties identifying its members on

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men's making up the will), which is one of Mao Ziyuan's works quoted in *Lushan Lianzong baojuan* (T 1973), *j.* 7, pp. 336c-337b.

[43] Cf. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist religion,* p. 93; ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings,* p. 68, note 14.

[44] *Shimen zhengtong,* 412d (*WXZJ,* vol. 130, p. 824b). Since the surname Mao is the same, it could be that he was Mao Ziyuan's son who would thus have abandoned celibacy. However, this cannot be substantiated by other evidence.

[45] Cf. ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings,* pp. 69–71 for some sources of the Song dynasty that seem to refer to the White Lotus movement.

the base of their religious names.[46] Mao Ziyuan had advised his disciples to use one of the four characters *pu, jue, miao,* and *dao* as part of their names.[47] During the Yuan dynasty, the characters *pu* and *jue* often appear in colophons and inscriptions, sometimes with explicit reference to the White Lotus, and it is possible that the bearers of such names were affiliated to the White Lotus tradition.[48] According to ter Haar's findings, the movement flourished particularly in northern Fujian and northern Jiangxi. It maintained cloisters usually financed by wealthy members or with money collected by the less affluent. The activities resembled those described above as "activist" type of lay Buddhism. White Lotus followers participated in the printing of Buddhist scriptures and do not seem to have been isolated socially. There was some regional communication between communities, but apparently no organizational superstructure. Members of the movement were usually married, including the keepers of the cloisters, but they maintained relations with Buddhist monks. In general, this type of White Lotus movement seems to have been respected even by many literati, and was an accepted religious tradition in the region south of the Yangtze river.

However, in 1308 a memorial was submitted criticizing White Lotus followers (*Bailian daoren* 白蓮道人) for mobilizing the common people under the pretext of doing good works. It was proposed that the White Lotus halls and the statues of the deities worshipped therein should be destroyed and the followers who lived in the cloisters be returned to their place of origin. The emperor approved the proposal.[49] This ban of the White Lotus movement provoked a long letter presented to the emperor by the monk Pudu in 1310. Pudu 普度 was abbot of the Donglin 東林 monastery on Mount Lu in Jiangxi, where Huiyuan had supposedly founded his White Lotus Society in the early fifth century. He considered himself a custodian of the orthodox White Lotus tradition, which he traced back to Huiyuan and Mao Ziyuan. In his letter he underlines the orthodox character of this tradition and explains the marvellous influence the practice of *nianfo* has on the

[46] Ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings,* pp. 80–89.

[47] *Lushan Lianzong baojian* (T 1973), *j.* 4, p. 326b.

[48] The conclusion is not beyond any question because these two affiliation characters were also used by the People of the Way (cf. ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings,* pp. 39 f), who according to ter Haar represented a tradition different from the White Lotus.

[49] Reprinted in Yang Ne, ed., *Yuandai Bailian jiao ziliao huibian,* pp. 176 f.

moral cultivation of the people and the stability of the empire. Not without flattering the achievements of the present Yuan dynasty, he presents Buddhism in general and Huiyuan's Lotus School in particular as a pillar of the moral culture of China that has always been recognized by the former emperors.[50] It may have been due to Pudu's apologia of the Lotus tradition or to the influence of other supporters that the ban of the White Lotus movement was removed after three years by the new emperor.[51] However, the movement enjoyed legal status only until 1322 when it was banned again, three years after the White Cloud movement had been forbidden.[52]

We must conclude that up to the ban in 1308 the White Lotus movement was not considered illegal or heterodox by the state, although it had been criticized as heterodox by Zongjian and Zhipan in the early thirteenth century. Thus, the perceptions and standards of these Buddhist clerics did not completely coincide with those of the state authorities. The White Lotus movement as represented by Pudu appears as a completely orthodox Buddhist tradition supported by influential and respected members of the society. In this respect it resembled the White Cloud movement although the latter had already attracted the suspicion of some officials during the Song dynasty. However, both movements flourished without being markedly impeded in their activities up to the fourteenth century, when for some reason the situation changed. They both were outlawed around the year 1320 and fifty years later, after the founding of the Ming dynasty in 1368, membership in the White Cloud or the White Lotus movement was explicitly threatened with punishment.

It is remarkable that opposition against these two movements was first formulated by Buddhist clerics, while the government does not seem to have been particularly concerned about them. Qingjue and Ziyuan were both banished after having been indicted by fellow monks, which shows that they caused some internal tensions within the Buddhist community. Qingjue was highly critical of other monks who did not support his teachings. And the mere fact that Qingjue and Ziyuan

[50] The text of the letter is reprinted in Yang Ne, ed., *Yuandai Bailian jiao ziliao huibian*, pp. 177–186.

[51] For the text of the decree cf. Yang Ne, ed., *Yuandai Bailian jiao ziliao huibian*, pp. 275 f, partly translated in Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist religion*, p. 97. According to Overmyer this edict must be dated 1313.

[52] *Yuanshi, j.* 28, p. 622.

founded communities identified by distinct names suggests that they were perceived as schismatics who separated themselves from the clerical community. This would have been less provoking had they not been successful in attracting many followers. The majority of them were lay people[53] who belonged to the activist type of lay Buddhists. Hence, both movements drew their following from the reservoir of highly committed lay believers on which also the orthodox clergy depended for popular support. Part of the human and by implication financial resources of lay Buddhists were thus channelled to these new movements and accordingly denied to the orthodox institutions. As a source of the late thirteenth century remarks, in all cities there were White Lotus halls that often had thousands of members, or hundreds if they were smaller, with only the smallest having some dozens. And it is added that their buildings rivalled the Buddhist and Daoist monasteries.[54] As early as in 1202 the same was noted about White Cloud cloisters.[55] Thus, both movements successfully competed with orthodox Buddhist institutions for popular support and financial resources. It is, therefore, understandable that monks who were not themselves adherents of these movements watched them with considerable mistrust and envy, because they threatened to undermine the superiority of conventional Buddhism.

We have to ask what it was that made these movements attractive enough even to rival clerical Buddhism. Evidently, the practice of *nianfo* and the teachings promoted by Mao Ziyuan were not significantly different from what was offered by orthodox Buddhism. Nor do the White Cloud teachings seem to have departed from what was available from orthodox Buddhist teachers. If the White Cloud and White Lotus teachings remained within the realm of doctrinal orthodoxy, as most scholars suppose, there must have been other factors that made these movements attractive to so many people. The most obvious difference from conventional Buddhism was the changed roles of lay people, and we may suspect that this was the main reason for the expansion of

[53] Although the White Cloud movement is often considered a clerical organization, the name *Baiyun cai* 白雲菜 (White Cloud Vegetarians) suggests that most followers were not monks but lay people (*Shimen zhengtong, j.* 4, 413a, in *WXZJ*, vol. 130, p. 825a). This is also in accordance with what we know about the later history of the movement.

[54] *Shuiyun cun min gao* 水雲村泯稿, by Liu Xun 劉壎, in *SKQS*, vol. 1195, *j.* 3, 8a/b, p. 356. The passage is translated in ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, p. 88.

[55] *Shimen zhengtong, j.* 4, 413b (*WXZJ*, vol. 130, p. 825b).

these movements. They offered opportunities to committed Buddhist believers to engage in more than cursory religious activities and to form communities of like-minded people without abandoning family life and subordinating to the rules of the Buddhist *saṃgha*. In the case of the White Cloud movement it appears that many followers copied a monastic life by accepting celibacy. They thus could circumvent the laws limiting the numbers of monks and nuns, which made it possible to gain members who were frustrated in their attempt to be regularly ordained. Hence, the movements absorbed Buddhist believers who for various reasons did not want to or could not enter the clerical community. They represented an alternative to monastic Buddhism that was in many ways more attractive since it allowed to gain similar religious and mundane rewards without accepting the costs and restrictions imposed by it.

White Lotus and White Cloud followers competed not only with the Buddhist clergy but also with many other religious specialists who offered ritual services to the population.[56] While the sources sympathetic to the two movements—mostly inscriptions written on their demand—usually eulogize their religious merits, other sources accuse them of deceiving the ignorant people to get their money. Both views may be one-sided. Without denying the religious motivation of most participants, we have to admit that they indeed collected money to build their cloisters or to finance other religious activities. Those who lived in the cloisters, but possibly others too, made religion their profession similar to monks or priests. That this could be a very rewarding profession reveals from the fact that the White Cloud leader Shen Mingren succeeded in accumulating a considerable fortune. To be sure, also Buddhist monasteries were often extremely wealthy and the profession of a monk was attractive to many not only for religious reasons. Religious services were usually offered not for free. Nothing suggests that the White Cloud and White Lotus movements in this regard differed much from conventional Buddhism. Mundane rewards may not have been the primary motivation to join the movements, they were, however, an element that should not be ignored when considering their attraction.

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[56] For the competition in the field of religious services cf. Valerie Hansen, *Changing gods in medieval China, 1127–1279*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp. 42–47.

Unlike the regular clergy, joining these movements was not limited by government restrictions. Nor were their activities submitted to the control of clerical and state institutions. Anyone could found a White Lotus society since the name was common and membership was not regulated by law or *vinaya* rules. As the White Lotus movement was generally respected, to use this name was a way to enhance the religious prestige and social recognition of religious groups even if they did not share the orthodox Buddhist beliefs taught by Mao Ziyuan and his followers. The monk Pudu in his attempt to defend what he understood to be the correct White Lotus teaching openly admitted that there were some people who distorted these teachings:

> Your servant has observed that in recent times groups of loitering people, who have neither left their families [as Buddhist monks] nor live a normal life with families, often falsely call themselves White Lotus. They do not understand the meaning of the *dharma* and practise absurd things. Such occurrences are extremely widespread.[57]

Pudu suspects that such groups have brought the White Lotus teachings into discredit and caused the prohibition of 1308. He continues describing ten false practices that were common among some popular religious groups wrongly claiming to belong to the White Lotus movement. Since such practices pervert the Lotus tradition they should be strictly forbidden. Pudu makes a point to be himself custodian of the true understanding of this tradition and that, therefore, his own teachings should be popularized within the empire:

> I beg to publish and spread the *Precious Mirror of the Practice* Nianfo *of the Lotus School* (*Lianzong nianfo baojian* 蓮宗念佛寶鑑)[58] in the empire to discern the true from the false and to exhort those who practise *nianfo* to do so according to its teachings. And it should be proclaimed in all prefectures and districts of the empire that the aforementioned heterodox schools and heretical teachings are forbidden by issuing clear criminal laws and enforcing control to eliminate the many impostures. With the exception of those who have received the Three Jewels and five commandments [for lay Buddhists] from the orthodox school of *nianfo* on Mount Lu, all the other heterodox and false teachings should be forbidden and eliminated.[59]

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[57] Pudu's letter to the emperor, reprinted in Yang Ne, ed., *Yuandai Bailian jiao ziliao huibian*, pp. 184 f.

[58] This seems to be an alternative title of Pudu's own *Lushan Lianzong baojian.*

[59] Yang Ne, ed., *Yuandai Bailian jiao ziliao huibian*, p. 185.

When Pudu stressed the orthodox character of the White Lotus tradition, he had in mind a lay movement controlled by and closely cooperating with the Buddhist clergy and the Lotus School of Mount Lu headed by himself. In his view only such clerical control could prevent people from falling into the traps of impostors who used the name White Lotus to spread heterodox teachings. Since Pudu demands penal laws to suppress such groups, it appears that he perceived them as a serious threat to the integrity of the Lotus School. Anyhow, he admits that heterodox groups falsely claiming the name White Lotus were widespread. We can conclude that by the fourteenth century the name White Lotus was not confined to the followers of what Pudu considered the orthodox Lotus School, but had become popular even among religious groups that had little in common with it except the name. However, despite Pudu's ardent defence of orthodoxy, public perception of White Lotus groups became more and more dominated by the less orthodox popular sects using the same name. This may explain why the so-called White Lotus Buddhism was finally banned in 1322. The White Cloud movement seems to have experienced a similar fate, oscillating as it did between close cooperation with monastic institutions and control by orthodox monks on the one hand, and the leadership of ambitious laypersons who made the movement a source of revenue and personal advancement on the other. These Buddhist reform movements not only brought about increased religious participation of lay believers and emancipation from dominant clerical institutions, but at the same time paved the way for ongoing diversification and a proliferation of sectarian groups.

2. Other Sectarian Traditions

The boundaries between the White Cloud and the White Lotus movements on the one hand and popular religious sects labelled as heterodox on the other appear clear if we accept the self-understanding of these Buddhist reform movements. There were, however, various standards for judging the orthodoxy of religious groups. Even Zhipan quotes a critic who accused White Lotus and White Cloud of falsely using the name of Buddhism to deceive the people.[60] As historians we have no criteria for deciding which religious groups were justly considered Bud-

[60] *Fozu tongji*, *j.* 54, p. 475a.

dhist or denied that label. We only can state that there were conflicting opinions. What we can observe, however, is that some religious groups were considered heterodox by state officials and subjected to repression. That is, at least these officials did not consider them as being part of orthodox Buddhism, which was a legal and state-supported form of religion. Hence, the attitude of the state authorities provides an external criterion allowing to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox religious groups. As we have seen, their standards did not always coincide with those of clerical observers or the self-image of the groups concerned. Applying the criterion of state repression we must conclude that the White Cloud and White Lotus movements moved from the realm of orthodoxy to heterodoxy. It was certainly not the normative type of Lotus Society advocated by Pudu that provoked government repression, but developments that contravened Pudu's ideals. Pudu implicitly admits that there were some undesirable developments because, after all, "not all men are saints." And since the Buddhist teaching was in its final period, "how could it be that there are not some heterodox and deceptive people who steal into our teaching to stealthily obtain food and easy-life?"[61] Furthermore, there were those who simply used the name White Lotus without having anything to do with it.

The enumeration of ten faults that cannot be allowed gives an impression of some practices in popular religious groups that Pudu considers as unacceptable in the White Lotus tradition.[62] He criticizes people who wildly build cloisters and halls to live there in community and to get food from others, which probably was one of the more mundane motives of some White Lotus (and White Cloud) followers. However, Pudu mentions practices that had little to do with the White Lotus tradition, such as making prophecies about coming disasters. He discusses this point in more detail in his *Lushan Lianzong baojian* 廬山蓮宗寶鑑 (*Precious Mirror of the Lotus School of Mount Lu*) where he describes popular religious practices threatening the orthodox White Lotus tradition. There we are informed about self-styled teachers competing with each other. Some of them are not different from witch-masters, others talk about the coming of Maitreya, still others use the light of candles to cause gods and ghosts to appear, or they decide about future luck

[61] Yang Ne, ed., *Yuandai Bailian jiao ziliao huibian,* p. 183.

[62] Yang Ne, ed., *Yuandai Bailian jiao ziliao huibian,* p. 185. The passage is translated and discussed by ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings,* pp. 100–106.

and calamities from the smoke of incense.[63] Such practices may not have been common among White Lotus followers, but since Pudu warns against them we may suppose that he had reason to do so. He probably had in mind some groups at the fringes of the White Lotus movement where the boundaries to other popular religious groups were permeable.

Heterodox sects during the Song

One such group was detected in 1281 in northern Jiangxi, a region where the White Lotus movement was flourishing. A sect leader of a White Lotus Society (*Bailian she*) by the name of Du Wanyi 杜萬一 attracted the attention of the authorities. Not much is known about this sect except that it used prophetic charts and scriptures, among them the *Amulets of the Five Lords* (*Wugong fu* 五公符), the *Chart for Disclosing the Hidden* (*Tuibei tu* 推背圖) and *Blood Basin* (*Xue pen* 血盆). The report remarks that such scriptures were used in the region south of the Yangtze by sects of different names.[64] This makes it clear that Du Wanyi's White Lotus Society was close to other popular sects and certainly at the margins of the "normative" White Lotus tradition as defended by Pudu. The use of prophetical scriptures was strictly forbidden by law because they were considered politically subversive. Prophecies about the future usually imply changes of the present condition, which could easily bring about expectations of dynastic changes. One of the scriptures mentioned, the *Amulets of the Five Lords,* had already been found more than hundred and fifty years earlier in 1124. It seems to have been very popular at that time, and the authorities ordered all copies to be collected and destroyed. Those who would not hand over their books within a set time should be punished according to the law against prophetic books (*chenshu* 讖書) and informers be rewarded.[65] The meticulous orders reveal that the book was considered highly dangerous. Sects using this scripture were by definition unlawful

[63] *Lushan Lianzong baojian* (T 1973), *j.* 10, p. 346a.

[64] *Yuan dianzhang* 元典章, Beijing: Zhonghua shudian, 1990 (Haiwangcun guji congkan 海王村古籍叢刊), *j.* 32, 14b (p. 483).

[65] *Song huiyao jigao*, *j.* 165, 89a/b (p. 6526). According to this source the scripture was also called *Wufu jing* 五符經, which shows that the *Wugong fu* probably was not just a collection of amulets. Scriptures with the title *Wugong jing* 五公經 were transmitted through the Ming and Qing dynasties and seem to circulate even today (see below p. 273, note 13).

and hence heterodox. Unfortunately, nothing is said about the region where this book was popular, but since the edict was to be displayed in all provinces it seems to have been widespread.

During the early twelfth century the government was particularly watchful of popular religious sects and the scriptures they used. As early as in 1121 an edict had been promulgated ordering the destruction of illegal scriptures with the same painstaking procedure as three years later.[66] The sects concerned are characterized as "Vegetarian Devil Worshippers" (*chicai shimo*). The edict was probably instigated by the Fang La 方臘 uprising in Zhejiang, which had been put down in the same year after fierce fighting and an enormous loss of life. The Fang La rebellion had some religious elements, which often are considered to be influenced by Manichaeism.[67] Although this view does not seem to be tenable any more, it is useful to consider shortly some testimonies about Manichaean activities since they were part of the religious landscape during the Song dynasty.

The existence of Manichaean communities in Zhejiang is attested by a memorial presented in 1120 shortly after the outbreak of the Fang La uprising. The report describes the Religion of Light (*Mingjiao* 明教) whose members had built "vegetarian halls" (*zhaitang*) in many districts and villages. It also gives a list of scriptures used by them, which, as is stated, were all not part of the Buddhist or Daoist canons. In reaction to this memorial, the emperor ordered to destroy all "vegetarian halls" and to severely punish the followers.[68] This proscription made Manichaeism an illegal religion, but as in many other cases this did not terminate the existence of Manichaean communities. They continued to flourish in Zhejiang and Fujian until the Ming dynasty, and it appears that Manichaeans were able to retain a strong sense of their religious identity. Although Chinese Manichaeism made use of Buddhist symbols and successfully attempted to have some of their

[66] *Song huiyao jigao, j.* 165, 83a/b (p. 6523).

[67] For the Fang La uprising cf. Kao Yu-kung, "A study of the Fang La rebellion," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 24 (1962/63), pp. 17–63., idem, "Source materials on the Fang La rebellion," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 26 (1966), pp. 211–240. Kao supports the then common view that the Fang La rebellion was influenced by Manichaeism, which is increasingly being doubted by later researchers. Cf. Samuel N. C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the later Roman empire and medieval China*, 2nd edition, revised and expanded (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament; 63), Tübingen: Mohr, 1992, pp. 282–285; ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, pp. 49–52.

[68] *Song huiyao jigao*, ch. 165, 78a-79a (pp. 6520 f). Translation and discussion in Lieu, *Manichaeism*, pp. 276 f.

scriptures included in the Daoist canon, their beliefs preserved much of the original Manichaean teachings and their communities were clearly distinct from Buddhist, Daoist, and popular religious groups.[69]

It is not clear when the label "Vegetarian Devil Worshippers" was first applied to Manichaean communities,[70] but the identity was established by the end of the twelfth century.[71] Zongjian, writing in the early thirteenth century, gives a list of scriptures supposedly used by Manichaeans, whom he calls the "heterodox teachings of the Vegetarian Devil Worshippers." None of the titles he mentions corresponds to what is known about Manichaean scriptures in China or to the list given in the memorial of 1120.[72] Obviously, Zongjian combined information about Manichaeism with what he knew about "Vegetarian Devil Worshippers" because he took their identity for granted. One of his sources can be identified, for the list of scriptures appears in exactly the same order in Wang Zhi's 王質 *Xueshan ji* 雪山集 (*Collected Writings from the Snow Mountain*).[73] Wang Zhi writes about "Vegetarian Devil Worshippers," but he does not make any reference to Manichaeism. He gives, however, some details about other sects.

Wang Zhi describes "Vegetarian Devil Worshippers" in Jiangxi, that is, the region south of the Yangtze where the People of the Way, White Cloud, and White Lotus were active, too. Some of the characteristics of the sects he presents are however found in sources referring to regions further north. He mentions that they use methods called

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[69] For the history of Manichaeism in China since the Song dynasty cf. Lieu, *Manichaeism,* pp. 268–304; Wang Jianchuan, *Cong Monijiao dao Mingjiao,* pp. 201–353.

[70] According to ter Haar (*The White Lotus teachings,* p. 53), the label was first used with reference to Manichaeism in 1121. I could not confirm this information.

[71] Zhipan quotes from Hong Mai's 洪邁 (1123–1202) *Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, where Manichaeism is clearly identified with Vegetarian Devil Worshippers. *Fozu tongji, j.* 55, p. 431a.

[72] Cf. *Shimen zhengtong, j.* 4, 412b/c (*WXZJ*, vol. 130, pp. 823 f). The only exception seems to be the *Erzong jing* 二宗經 (*Scripture on the Two Principles*), which could be an abridged title of the *Erzong sanji jing* 二宗三際經 (*Scripture on the Two Principles and Three Ages*) mentioned by Zhipan (*Fozu tongji, j.* 55, p. 431a). However, the content of the two scriptures as summarized in the respective sources is completely different. One must suppose therefore, that the *Erzong jing* mentioned by Zongjian was not the Manichaean *Erzong sanji jing* but a different book used by other groups. For details see Wang Jianchuan, *Cong Monijiao dao Mingjiao,* pp. 239 f.

[73] *Xueshan ji* 雪山集, by Wang Zhi 王質, in *SKQS*, vol. 1149, p. 369a/b. Wang Zhi was *jinshi* in 1160, hence the information is from the second half of the twelfth century.

Erhui 二會 (two assemblies?) and *Jin'gang chan* 金剛禪 (Diamond *Dhyāna*). A memorial of 1055 reports on the situation in the capital Kaifeng:

> I have observed that in recent times in the capital there are work-shy and good-for-nothing commoners like Li Qing 李清 and others who privately found groups of up to two- or three-hundred people. They gather at night and disperse at dawn under the pretext of reciting Buddhist *sūtras* and are [therefore] commonly called "*sūtra* societies" (*jingshe* 經社). This custom is very widespread so that they irritate the people and something may happen. It is the same type as in the past the *Jin'gang chan* and *Erhuizi* 二會子.[74]

Here, sects called *Jin'gang chan* and *Erhui(zi)* appear in northern province of Henan more than hundred years before Wang Zhi described them in southern China. They are referred to as belonging to the past, but it remains open how far a past the author had in mind. Apparently, they were *sūtra*-recitation groups similar to the "*sūtra* societies" that provoked the memorial. In any case, they were sectarian groups unconnected with monks or clerical institutions. Groups that were likewise called *jingshe* (*sūtra* societies) or *xianghui* 香會 (incense gatherings) were forbidden in southern Henan some decades later.[75] It is, of course, not possible to say much about these groups, except that they were perceived as being different from common Buddhist lay organizations. They were not connected with monasteries and represented a type of popular religious group considered to be a source of social disorder. It seems that there were certain sectarian traditions using the names *Jin'gang chan* and *Erhui* as autonyms, since these names were known at different times in distant provinces.

These traditions seem to have spread from the North to the region south of the Yangtze where they surfaced in the twelfth century. While they were usually treated under the general label of "Vegetarian Devil Worshippers", there is some additional information about them. One source states that *Jin'gang chan* recently appeared in Jiangxi and Zhejiang. It is explained that they were called *Jin'gang chan* because they used the *Jin'gang jing* 金剛經 (*Diamond Sūtra*) for recitation. However, they understood this scripture in a way different from normal Buddhists. Rather strange is the remark that they had their origin in the *Wudoumi* (Five Pecks of Rice) and therefore did not pronounce the word "horn" (*jiao*

[74] *Chao Qingxian gong ji* 超清獻公集, *j.* 2, quoted in Chen Gaohua 陳高華: "Monijiao yu chicai shimo" 摩尼教與吃菜事魔, in: *Zhongguo nongmin zhanzheng shi luncong*, 4 (1982), p. 101.

[75] *Song huiyao jigao*, ch. 165, 48b (p. 6505), referring to the year 1108.

角).[76] Apparently the same sect is described in another contemporary source in greater detail. Although no name is given, it is mentioned that they had a taboo on the character *jiao* because they considered Zhang Jiao as their ancestor or patriarch (*zu* 祖). They used the *Jin'gang jing* but interpreted it in a distorted way. Evidently, they were not conventional Buddhists although they were vegetarians and abstained from liquor, for they did not worship gods, buddhas, or ancestors and buried their dead naked without a coffin. They worshipped, however, the sun and the moon. The sect is described as highly organized with communities in different places closely cooperating, and leaders who regularly received money from the members. The account closes:

> Their refusal to pay respects to their ancestors and their practice of naked burial are detrimental to public morals. They also assert that human existence is full of misery. Hence, to terminate it by killing is to relieve misery. This is what they call 'deliverance' and he who 'delivers' many will become a Buddha. Therefore, once their numbers increase, they will take advantage of political chaos and rise in revolt. Their greatest crime is the pleasure they take in killing. They hate Buddhism in particular because its prohibition of killing is an offence to them.[77]

The source contains some points that can be interpreted as referring to Manichaeism, but even more that cannot be reconciled with Manichaean beliefs and practices.[78] Manichaeans abhorred killing. Furthermore, they highly revered their founder Mani and it is hard to imagine that there could be such gross misunderstandings as to confuse him with Zhang Jiao. It is, therefore, more probable that the sect described here was the same as the *Jin'gang chan* for which the strange avoidance of the character *jiao* is likewise attested.

This brings us back to Wang Zhi's account of "Vegetarian Devil Worshippers" from the end of the twelfth century. He explicitly names *Jin'gang chan* and *Erhui* as part of their terminology. The groups described

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[76] Ye Mengde 葉夢得, *Bishu luhua* 避暑錄話, *j.* 4, quoted in Wang Jianchuan, *Cong Monijiao dao Mingjiao*, p. 238. Ye Mengde lived from 1077 to 1148. The implication of the taboo seems to be that the word *jiao* 角 (horn) was avoided because it was the personal name of Zhang Jiao. Zhang Jiao, however, was not the leader of the Five Pecks of Rice Sect (*Wudoumi dao*), but of the Yellow Turbans.

[77] *Jilei bian* 雞肋編, by Wang Chuo 莊綽 (Songren xiaoshuo 宋人小説; 16), Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1990, *j.* 1, 9b. Translation by Lieu, *Manichaeism*, p. 279. Lieu gives a translation of the whole text summarized above.

[78] For a detailed discussion of this text see Lieu, *Manichaeism*, pp. 279–283; Wang Jianchuan, *Cong Monijiao dao Mingjiao*, pp. 236–238.

by him were hierarchically organized in three levels with the leaders of the highest level having communities of several thousand members. Wang Zhi gives the titles of the their scriptures, two of which deserve particular attention: *Foshuo tilei (jing)* 佛説涕淚(經) (*[Sūtra] Spoken by the Buddha about Tears*) and *Xiao da mingwang chushi kaiyuan jing* 小大明王出世開元經 (*Sūtra about the Lesser and Greater King of Light Appearing in the World to Open a New Era*). The latter of these two scriptures probably influenced the sect of Han Shantong 韓山童 and the rebellion at the end of the Yuan dynasty. It will be treated below. The former allows to trace the tradition from which this sect derived further back in history.

A *Dilei jing* 滴淚經 (*Sūtra about Tears*) is mentioned as one of the scriptures used in a sect that started a rebellion in 1047 under the leadership of Wang Ze 王則.[79] The title without doubt is the same as the *Foshuo tilei jing* used by the sect in Jiangxi.[80] However, Wang Ze was active in Beizhou 貝州 district in present-day Hebei province far in the North.[81] The account states that in this region heterodox traditions were strong. Besides the *Dilei jing* there were other prophetic books such as the *Wulong (jing)* 五籠(經) (*Scripture about the Five Dragons*). They contained teachings such as "Śākyamuni Buddha has retired and Maitreya Buddha will rule the world." This gives us some idea of the beliefs held by this sect. Evidently, it belonged to the Maitreyist tradition with its beliefs in the transformation of the present world and the coming of a new perfect realm. Wang Ze's rebellion was the political expression of millenarian expectations. He established a new state called Anyang 安陽, which is a common name for Amitābha's Pure Land but here seems to refer to the future realm of Maitreya.

Millenarian traditions were deeply rooted in Beizhou and neighbouring Jizhou. They can be followed back to Wang Huaigu, who three centuries before had preached the same slogan, and even further

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[79] *Songshi, j.* 292, p. 9770. *Songshi jishi benmo* 宋史紀事本末, by Chen Bangzhan 陳邦瞻, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977, *j.* 32, pp. 279 f.

[80] Zongjian, who repeats the same list as Wang Zhi with slight changes, gives the title *Foshuo dilei* 滴淚, which corresponds to the characters in the *Songshi.* Incidentally, Zongjian also changes the title of the *Xiao da mingwang chushi kaiyuan jing* into *Da xiao mingwang chushi kaiyuan jing* (*Shimen zhengtong, j.* 4, 412b, in *WXZJ*, vol. 130, p. 823).

[81] The name of the district Beizhou was changed to Enzhou 恩州 after the repression of the Wang Ze's uprising (*Songshi, j.* 11, p. 224). The text reporting the rebellion therefore calls it Enzhou.

back to the rebellion of Faqing in 515.[82] Since the scriptures contained prophecies about the future, we may guess that the *Dilei jing* (*Sūtra about Tears*) was a book similar to the *Wugong jing* 五公經 (*Scripture of the Five Lords*), dealing with the tears caused by the suffering experienced at the end of the present *kalpa*.[83] Even if not much more information is available, we can state a remarkable continuity of millenarian beliefs in this region. As we shall see later, the province of Hebei was still a centre of sectarian activities during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Millenarian traditions were not confined to this region. They were a latent element in popular Buddhist traditions. The interpretation of the present time as the final period of the *dharma* was part even of orthodox Buddhist beliefs. Under certain conditions it was only a small step to more heterodox ideas about the imminent end of the present era and the coming of a new rule replacing the existing conditions. In popular religious milieus uncontrolled by clerical and state authorities, beliefs about changes of the spiritual rule could develop a dynamism that blended them with ideas about changes in the temporal rule. The conviction to have attained a new and perfect teaching superseding the old one was thus occasionally transformed into the belief to represent the avant-garde of the new world to come. One such case seems to have been the sect leader Wu Yi 毋乙 who in 920 was executed for having incited a rebellion. He was active in Chenzhou 陳州 prefecture, which lies south of Kaifeng in present-day Henan province. As the *Old History of the Five Dynasties* relates, Wu Yi was a commoner with an inclination towards heterodox teachings of a Buddhist brand. He founded his own sect called "Supreme Vehicle" (*Shangcheng* 上乘). The name appears to express the conviction of religious superiority over conventional Buddhism and the intent to replace it. He attracted many followers who considered him as new emperor. The rebellion led by him was, however, quickly put down.[84]

The text says nothing about Maitreyist beliefs, but it is clear that Wu Yi's sect was a Buddhist-inspired religious group with millenarian elements. The Buddhist historian Zanning, writing at the end of the

[82] Cf. above pp. 111 ff and pp. 122 f.

[83] I refer here to the preserved versions of the *Wugong jing* supposing that the earlier books of this title were similar in content. It is tempting to speculate that the *Wulong jing* referred to in the *Songshi* was another title for *Wugong jing*. I could, however, find nothing in the text of the *Wugong jing* supporting this hypothesis.

[84] *Xin Wudaishi* 新五代史, by Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974. *j.* 10, p. 144, partly translated in ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, p. 47.

tenth century, draws a different picture of this sect. According to him it was a group of Manichaeans.[85] Zanning apparently attempted to keep a distance to this heterodox movement that placed the Buddhist tradition in a bad light. Zanning held the office of Supervisor of the *Saṃgha* (*senglu*), which was responsible to the government, and he had, therefore, a strong interest in exonerating Buddhism from the suspicion of heterodoxy. However, his reinterpretation of the events is not very convincing since he admits at the same time that Wu Yi's teachings were based on Buddhism and gives the further information that some Buddhist monks later joined the sect for mundane reasons. Evidently, the sectarian tradition represented by Wu Yi did not vanish with his execution but remained part of the popular religious life in the region.

The sparse information we have about popular religious movements of this type during the Song dynasty does not permit to reconstruct particular sectarian lines. It is obvious, however, that there was a continuity of millenarian traditions and beliefs in the near advent of Maitreya. These traditions are conspicuous in northern China. They were transmitted not only orally, but also through scriptures dealing with the end of the present *kalpa*, impending catastrophes, and the coming of a saviour or a new ruler. Scriptures of this type were the *Wugong jing* (*Scripture of the Five Lords*), which was widespread in the early twelfth century, the *Dilei jing* (*Sūtra about Tears*) and the *Xiao dao mingwang jing* (*Scripture about the Lesser and Greater King of Light*). Through the *Dilei jing,* which was popular in the northern province of Hebei at the time of Wang Ze's uprising, it is possible to establish the spread of these beliefs over large areas, for the same book was found more than hundred years later in the southern part of the country. We know nothing about the processes engendering the spread of this book, whether it was brought to the South on an individual base or through the expansion of certain sectarian groups. However, there is some evidence that some popular sects spread over considerable distance. Groups known as *Jin'gang chan* and *Erhui* are attested in Kaifeng as well as later in Jiangxi. They were well-organized and had a large following of thousands of people. Their beliefs seem to have been based on Buddhism and particularly the *Diamond Sūtra*, which they interpreted in an idiosyncratic

[85] *Sengshilüe* 僧史略, by Zanning 贊寧, in *WXZJ., j.* 3, 163c, in *WXZJ,* vol. 150, p. 326. The passage is translated in Lieu, *Manichaeism,* p. 265. Cf. also Lieu's discussion of Zanning's information pp. 265 f.

way. Since they also used the *Sūtra about Tears* it may be assumed that they shared the Maitreyist beliefs known from Wang Ze's sect.

Though these findings are inconclusive as to the identity of individual sectarian traditions and the wider context of their beliefs, there evidently were popular religious groups that were older than and had nothing to do with the emerging White Cloud and White Lotus movements. These popular religious groups did not depend on Buddhist monks and were apparently not perceived as lay Buddhists. In the early twelfth century the label "Vegetarian Devil Worshippers" gained some currency to refer to religious groups considered heterodox.[86] Popular religious groups of this kind caused considerable concern to the authorities, which regarded them as a source of social disorder and rebellion. Between 1132 and 1202 no less than twenty edicts were promulgated to suppress them.[87] Government pressure on local officials to control and repress sects such as *Jin'gang chan* and *Erhui* was strong, and it seems that the authorities often did not care much about different kinds of popular religious groups.[88] Hence, the label "Vegetarian Devil Worshipper" was increasingly applied to all kinds of religious groups not controlled by the official clergy, including the People of the Way, followers of the White Cloud and White Lotus movements, and Manichaeans. Accordingly all could be treated together and regarded as one single type of heterodox religion. In a memorial form around 1166 we read about them:

> Such people are found everywhere. In Huainan[89] 淮南 they are called *Erhuizi* 二檜子, in Zhejiang they are called *Mouni jiao* 牟尼教 (Mouni teaching), east of the Jiang river[90] they are called *Siguo*[91] 四果 (Four Fruits),

[86] This label may have been influenced by Zanning's description of Wu Yi's sect. According to him, they worshipped the "devil king" (*mowang* 魔王). Although Zanning suggests that they were Manichaeans to draw a line between them and official Buddhism, his account may have promoted the idea that these popular sects worshipped the devil.

[87] Lieu, *Manichaeism*, p. 286.

[88] The literate Zhang Caifu 張才富 describes in an ironic poem how government troupes rush in to raid a White Lotus group in search for followers of the *Erhui* sect. (*Yijian zhi* 夷堅志, by Hong Mai 洪邁, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981, vol. 4, p. 1352). The poem is translated in ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, pp. 55 f. Ter Haar translates *Erhui* as "two meetings".

[89] I.e., north of the Yangtze, parts of modern Anhui and Jiangsu.

[90] I.e., north-eastern part of Jiangxi.

[91] *Siguo* (four fruits) probably refers to Qingjue's White Cloud teaching. In the *Shimen zhengtong* (j. 4, 412c, p. 824) we read about him: "He explained the canonical writings by establishing (his principles) of Four Fruits (*siguo*) and Ten Stages."

> in Jiangxi they are called *Jin'gang chan* (Diamond *Dhyāna*), in Fujian they are called *Mingjiao* (Teaching of Light) or *Jiedi zhai* 揭諦齋 (Vegetarians who uphold the truth) and the like.[92]

The memorial continues dealing with mainly Manichaean practices, but mixes the description with elements that seem to belong to other groups. The author brings together popular sects including *Erhui* and *Jin'gang chan* with followers of the White Cloud movement and seems to regard them all as Manichaeans. For him they are all the same sort. Accordingly, he has no difficulties in drawing a line from the Yellow Turbans leader Zhang Jiao of the Han dynasty over the Daoist rebel Sun En in the late fourth century to Fang La and the sectarians of his own time.[93] With the addition of Han Shantong of the Yuan dynasty, these remained the common historical paradigms for the interpretation of popular sects down to the twentieth century.

It is mostly due to this negligence of differences between diverse sects that it is impossible to gain a clearer picture of the popular religious traditions of the Song dynasty. What we do know, however, is that the government considered them as heterodox and attempted to suppress them by all available means. Although the White Cloud and the White Lotus movements were occasionally affected by this climate of religious surveillance, they usually were not mistaken as sects of the older type. Only in the early fourteenth century the Yuan government decided to outlaw them. It is hard to imagine that the followers of these two movements revoked their beliefs after the ban, and we must therefore suppose that the traditions were continued in some way. They became part of the popular religious culture even if they disappeared as distinct religious movements.

Millenarian sects during the Yuan

One reason why the authorities finally decided to classify the White Cloud and the White Lotus movement as heterodox religions may have been that some of the groups acting under these names became increasingly similar to other popular sects. As we have seen, the White

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[92] *Weinan wenji* 渭南文集, by Lu You 陸游, in *SKQS*, vol. 1163, *j.* 5, 7a/b, pp. 346. For translations see Édouard Chavannes, and Paul Pelliot, "Un traité manichéen retrouvé en Chine. Traduit et annoté (Deuxième partie)," *Journal Asiatique*, 11, no. 1/1 (1913), pp. 99–199, 261–394: 344–351 and Lieu, *Manichaeism*, p. 287.

[93] *Weinan wenji*, *j.* 5, 8a, p. 347.

Cloud leader was not a regularly ordained monk but an ambitious sect leader who with his wealth also acquired power and influence. This type of sect leader commanding thousands of followers understandably was seen as a potential threat. In the case of the White Lotus we have observed that in 1281 Du Wanyi rebelled under this name. Since he used the *Wugong fu* (*Amulets of the Five Lords*) it is clear that this group was influenced by popular religious traditions other than the original White Lotus. The White Lotus movement was no organized and centrally controlled organization, and although Pudu admonished the believers not to mingle with heterodox groups, there were no means to prevent it. At the margins of the movement was room for all kinds of religious beliefs and practices. In 1296 a monk by the name Yuan Puzhao 袁普昭 was arrested in Yuan'an 遠安 district (in modern Hubei) who wrote prophetical books about coming disasters and miseries. The books were printed and distributed in the villages. Puzhao called himself *Wu'ai zu* 無礙祖 (All-pervasive Patriarch) and had a wooden image of himself carved for veneration. Apparently he was considered to be a divine manifestation, which foreshadows the role of sect founders in the late Ming dynasty. His disciples were mostly monks, but it was only a small community.[94]

The source does not note that Yuan Puzhao belonged to the White Lotus movement, but the religious affiliation character *pu* in his name suggests that he was close to it. Here we have an example of what Pudu may have had in mind when he warned White Lotus followers not to adopt heretical practices. Books containing prophecies were the archetype of heretical literature since the Han dynasty, and their mere possession was always threatened with severe punishment. The *Wugong fu* used by Wu Duyi belonged to this type and it seems, therefore, that by the late thirteenth century some White Lotus groups had been affected by these popular traditions. The scattered references we have about White Lotus groups after the prohibition of 1322 suggest that parts of the movement were driven in exactly the direction that the government repressions intended to bar. Being heterodox organizations they had to operate clandestinely and completely separated from the orthodox Buddhist clergy. Orthodox Buddhism, on the other hand, had to avoid any impression of being associated with heterodox groups. What had remained of clerical and by implication government control in Pudu's time did, therefore, vanish.

[94] *Yuan dianzhang* 元典章, *j.* 52, 8b-9b, pp. 742 f.

This does not mean that the religious tradition of the White Lotus movement as founded by Mao Ziyuan and defended by Pudu disappeared. However, those followers who were well-integrated in the ordinary society had to lose much if they belonged to an illegal organization. On the other hand, it was not difficult for them to continue their beliefs and practices without great risks as lay Buddhists abandoning the name White Lotus. This may explain why the name White Lotus became rare in certain social milieus where it once was popular. For others, who did not belong to the social milieu of the elites and well-to-do, the label of heterodoxy was less threatening. As many other popular religious groups judged as heterodox they could survive at the margins of society. Hence, the official ban on the White Lotus movement must have had a selective effect. Parts of the movement approached conventional lay Buddhism, while the rest was brought closer to the milieu of less conventional popular sects.

One case where we can observe this process by which remnants of the original White Lotus movement merged with popular religious tradition of the Maitreyist type can be reconstructed. In 1338 the monk Peng Yingyu 彭瑩玉 rebelled in Hunan leading a force of more than five thousand. The rebels wrote the character *Fo* 佛 (Buddha) on their back in the belief to be such protected against weapons. While the rebellion was soon put down, Peng Yingyu escaped.[95] Although a later source relates that he spread the White Lotus teachings (*Bailian jiao*),[96] nothing indicates that he propagated practising *nianfo* and devotion to Amitābha or anything else typical for the normative White Lotus tradition. Instead, he urged people to recite the name of Maitreya Buddha.[97] He probably preached a millenarian message about the advent of Maitreya. Anyhow, in 1351 another rebellion broke out that clearly was millenarian since the rebels used the slogan "Maitreya appears and will be ruler of the world."[98] The man who made this

[95] *Gengshen waishi* 庚申外史, by Quan Heng 權衡, in *Yuandai biji xiaoshuo* 元代筆記小說, vol. 4, edited by Zhou Guangpei 周光培 (*Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng*; 30), Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994, *j.* 1, 2b, p. 516.

[96] *Zhengde Ruizhou fu zhi* 正德瑞周府志, *j.* 10, quoted in Yang Ne, ed., *Yuandai Bailian jiao ziliao huibian*, p. 278. The name is here given as Peng Guoyu 彭國玉. The source is from the early sixteenth century. At that time the name *Bailian jiao* was used in a very general way to refer to heterodox religious groups.

[97] *Caomuzi* 草木子, by Ye Ziqi 葉子奇 (Yuandai shiliao biji congkan 元代史料筆記叢刊), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959, p. 51.

[98] *Hu Guang zongzhi* 湖廣總志, *j.* 98, quoted in Yang Ne, and Chen Gaohua,

prophecy was a certain Zou Pusheng 鄒普勝, and the name with the character *pu* again suggests that he belonged to a group deriving from the White Lotus tradition. The two sources state that this movement was inspired by the example of the monk Peng, that is, Peng Yingyu. This shows that parts of the former White Lotus movement operated in the same sectarian milieu as this Maitreyist sect. It is difficult, however, to consider people like Zou Pusheng as followers of the White Lotus movement, if we conceive it in the normative way as Pudu did. What we have here are popular sects exposed to a variety of influences, one of which was the heritage of the former White Lotus movement. Yet, judging from their beliefs they had little in common with Mao Ziyuan's White Lotus Vegetarians, but belonged to popular sectarian traditions of the millenarian type.

The rebellion in which Zou Pusheng played a leading role affected large parts of southern China. The rebels installed Xu Shouhui 徐壽輝 as emperor, who was, however merely a figurehead for more powerful and ambitious leaders. He was killed in 1360. During the same years in the North another rebel force formed under the leadership of Liu Futong 劉福通 who likewise installed his own emperor, Han Lin'er 韓林兒. Both armies fought against the Yuan troops and with each other to compete for the rule of the empire. After decades of civil war one of the generals of the northern rebels gained supremacy and in 1368 established himself as emperor of a new dynasty. This was Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋, better known as emperor Taizu 太祖 of the Ming 明 dynasty.[99]

The great uprising that brought about the end of the Yuan dynasty is primarily a military and political event, which does not need being treated in more detail here. Though later historiographers saw one of its ideological sources in the White Lotus movement, the name "White Lotus" does not appear in contemporary sources, as Barend ter Haar has meticulously shown.[100] It is true, however, that the ideological background of the rebels in the South and in the North alike was strongly influenced by popular religious beliefs. Yet, these beliefs had

eds., 陽訥 陳高華, *Yuandai nongmin zhanzheng shiliao huibian* 元代農民戰爭史料彙編, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985, vol. 2–1, p. 111.

[99] For the rebel forces in the south and north and the chronology of the rebellion cf. Frederick W. Mote, "The rise of the Ming dynasty, 1330–1367," in *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part I*, edited by Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett (The Cambridge History of China; 7), 1988, pp. 11–57: 37–43.

[100] Cf. ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, pp. 114–130.

their roots not in the White Lotus movement but in the millenarian expectations of the Maitreyist traditions. Similar to Zou Pusheng in the South, who declared that Maitreya shall rule the world, in the North a man called Han Shantong 韓山童 propagated beliefs about Maitreya's advent to usher in a new and perfect kingdom. Han Shantong proclaimed that "the empire will be in great disorder and Maitreya will be born down [into the world]."[101] Liu Futong used this prophecy for his political propaganda and declared Han Shantong to be the descendant of the Song emperor Huizong 徽宗 (ruled 1101–1125) and the future ruler of China. After Han Shantong was captured and executed in 1351, Liu Futong installed his son Han Lin'er in 1355 as emperor with the title "Lesser King of Light" (*Xiao Mingwang* 小明王).[102] Han Lin'er died (or was killed) of drowning in 1366 while crossing a river.[103] At that time the actual leader of the northern rebels was already Zhu Yuanzhang.

The rebel forces were called Red Army (*hongjun* 紅軍) or Incense Army (*xiangjun* 香軍).[104] The former name probably refers to the red turbans worn by the rebel troops in the North and South alike, while the latter points to the practice of burning incense. From the Song dynasty on, offering incense is regularly mentioned as a characteristic of popular religious groups,[105] which is strange because incense offerings were common in all Chinese religions and, therefore, nothing remarkable. Apparently these sects had specific rituals that were different from conventional Buddhist or Daoist practice. Incense offerings must have been a central element in these rituals. In a sectarian scripture printed in 1430, half a century after the fall of the Yuan dynasty, the importance of regular incense offerings four times a day is attested,[106] and elaborate incense rituals were common in some sects since the Song dynasty.[107] Anyhow, the sources recount that Han Shantong's grandfather was a

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[101] *Mingshi* 明史, by Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974, *j.* 122, p. 3682.

[102] *Yuanshi* 元史, *j.* 42, p. 891; *j.* 44, p. 922; *Ming shi* 明史, *j.* 122, p. 3682.

[103] *Mingshi* 明史, *j.* 122, p. 3684.

[104] *Mingshi*, *j.* 122, p. 3682.

[105] The earliest occurrence seems to be 1108 when popular religious groups called *xianghui* (Incense Assemblies) or *jingshe* (*Sūtra* Societies) were forbidden. Cf. above note 75.

[106] Cf. below p. 278.

[107] The *Weinan wenji*, *j.* 5, 8a, p. 347, mentions that the Manichaeans used incense, which is here specified as *ruxiang* 乳香 (frankincense of the plant *Boswellia Carteri*), to

sect leader who under the name White Lotus Gathering (*Bailian hui* 白蓮會) burned incense and attracted followers.[108] Han Shantong apparently continued the teachings of his grandfather when he proclaimed the coming of Maitreya. These beliefs were transmitted within his family, which apparently held the hereditary position of sect leaders. This would explain why it was accepted that the future ruler would be a member of this family and after Han Shantong's death his son was chosen as new emperor with the title *Lesser King of Light.* Maitreya messianism was since the medieval ages part of the popular religious culture in southern Hebei, and it is exactly this region where Han Shantong and his ancestors spread their teachings.[109] As we have seen, in the eleventh century Wang Ze was active not far from it and used the common belief in Maitreya's descent to mobilize his forces of rebellion. These beliefs must have been widespread during the final years of the Yuan dynasty, for otherwise they would have been of little use as a means of politico-religious propaganda. Even during the Song dynasty, scriptures used by Wang Ze were found in south China where they appeared together with others including the *Xiao da mingwang chushi kaiyuan jing* (*Sūtra about the Lesser and Greater King of Light Appearing in the World to Open a New Era*). Hence, the rebel forces in the South and North could both rely on similar millenarian beliefs marked by the expectation of Maitreya and a King of Light.[110]

The discernable religious elements in the ideology of the late Yuan uprisings show the continuity of millenarian beliefs as part of the popular religious tradition. These beliefs can be traced back as far as the sixth century if we consider their Maitreyist variety. They are even older if we draw a line to Daoist millenarianism and messianism.[111] These

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such a degree that its price had risen. As has been seen above, the source fuses information about various popular religious groups.

[108] *Yuanshi, j.* 42, p. 891; cf. *Mingshi, j.* 122, p. 3681.

[109] Han Shantong's family was from Luancheng 欒城, but his grandfather had been exiled to Yongnian 永年 district (*Yuanshi, j.* 42, p. 891). This was not a very severe punishment, because the distance is less than 200 kilometres. Both places are in southern Hebei. Luancheng was not far from Jizhou and Beizhou (Enzhou), where Wang Ze was active in 1047.

[110] Ter Haar has reconstructed from several sources the slogan used by the rebels. According to him, it was *Tianxia daluan, Mile xiasheng, mingwang chushi* 天下大亂彌勒下生明王出世 ("the empire is in great disorder, Maitreya Buddha shall descend to be reborn and the King of Light shall appear in this world"); cf. ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings,* pp. 115 f.

[111] The *Mingshi (j.* 122, p. 3691) notes that some said Han Lin'er's mother was

ideas were without doubt mainly transmitted orally and became part of popular lore, diffusing in popular culture to an extent that they could be used to mobilize large followings. However, there were also scriptures circulating that contained prophecies about the end of the present *kalpa*, the advent of Maitreya and the coming of a King of Light (*mingwang*). The symbol *King of Light* appears already in Buddhist apocryphal scriptures popular during Tang dynasty or even earlier.[112] Although distributing or possessing such prophetic books was forbidden and threatened with punishment in all dynasties, they continued to be transmitted, or new writings of the same kind were produced. Since their distribution was dangerous and demanded a certain degree of social infrastructure, such scriptures probably circulated mainly in more or less closed groups belonging to social milieus without intense contacts to the elite culture. We know little about the organization of these sectarian groups and their mutual relationship. However, since certain scriptures were known in different parts of the country, it seems that some sects or individual members were actively propagating their beliefs. According to sources of the Song dynasty, there were sects that had thousands of members and an hierarchically organized leadership. At least in some cases sect leadership was transmitted within families, but generally there is little evidence of extended and enduring organizations of millenarian sects. This may partly be due to the scarcity of sources, which usually do not permit to trace the historical origins and development of sectarian groups. There is some evidence that during the eleventh and twelfth centuries there were identifiable traditions known as *Jin'gang chan* and *Erhui*, and the repeated prohibitions of religious groups classified as "Vegetarian Devil Worshippers" show that heterodox sects were not just transient phenomena. Usually, however, the sources do not allow one to distinguish clearly between different sectarian traditions and to decide to which extent millenarian beliefs were commonly shared.

The White Cloud and White Lotus movements emerging during the twelfth century were distinctly different from these popular sects and may best be considered Buddhist reform movements. While they

surnamed Li 李. This could be a reference to popular traditions expecting a future saviour of the Li family. They are attested since antiquity, for example in the figure of Li Hong. The name Li was still important in messianic traditions during the eighteenth century. Cf. Barend J. ter Haar, *Ritual and mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an identity* (Sinica Leidensia; 43), Leiden: Brill, 1998, pp. 268–270 *et passim.*

[112] Cf. above pp. 145 ff.

retained contacts with parts of the Buddhist clergy, they developed their own forms of organizations in which lay believers played a considerably greater role than in conventional Buddhism. Since these groups developed their own dynamics and were not institutionally controlled by the *saṃgha* or the state, they diversified, some of them apparently approaching the socially more marginal popular sects. This tendency was probably reinforced after they were declared illegal in the early fourteenth century and followers belonging to well-to-do social milieus preferred not to be associated with them.

By the end of the Yuan dynasty there were, thus, two main traditions of popular religious groups. On the one hand there were lay Buddhist traditions deriving mainly from the White Lotus and the White Cloud movements. They formed *sūtra*-recitation groups using scriptures that were part of the orthodox Buddhist canon. The self-understanding of such groups was clearly Buddhist and they could cooperate with monks on an individual base. Still, they were not controlled by the Buddhist clergy and thus at the margins of official Buddhism. They were, however, not at the margins of society and usually do not seem to have been considered heterodox by the authorities. On the other hand, there were popular sects with their own ritual traditions and sometimes their own scriptures. Both rituals and scriptures are identity markers of religious groups. Sects standing outside the ritual and scriptural traditions of the three orthodox teachings represented, therefore, a distinct popular religious tradition. Since they formed religious communities defined neither by common descent nor by common residency or occupation, they are conveniently classified as popular religious sects. Some of these sects were strongly influenced by diffused millenarian beliefs, but there were probably many others where under normal conditions millenarian expectations were not prominent. However, even if the popular sectarian traditions were not homogeneous, as a whole they represented a discrete element of the religious culture in early modern China. They formed religious organizations independent of the state-controlled institutions of the orthodox religions. Although sects of this kind were organized mainly on a local or regional level without an organizational superstructure, they could under certain circumstances combine to mass movements based on the latent millenarian ideas diffused within popular culture. The uprisings of the late Yuan dynasty became one of the historical paradigms for this type of millenarian rebellion and reinforced the prevailing perception of popular sects as politically subversive

organizations undermining the public order and the morality of the people. From the Song dynasty on, countless edicts to suppress popular sects had marked them as heterodox. This attitude of the state and the ruling elites as well as the policy of repression were continued during the following Ming dynasty and reached its climax in the violent persecutions of the Qing.

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PART TWO

POPULAR RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS DURING THE MING AND QING DYNASTIES

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INTRODUCTION

After decades of internal wars and the collapse of the Mongol dynasty, the new Ming emperor established an autocratic rule that brought peace and laid the foundation for the economic consolidation of the empire. The Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644), which lasted for almost three centuries, is the formative period of a number of new religious movements that became a distinctive feature in the religious landscape of early modern China. Most of the new religious movements emerging after the late fifteenth century were continued during the Qing dynasty and some of them still exist today. In contrast to earlier sects it is possible to gain a fairly detailed picture of them. Many of their scriptures have been preserved and allow to reconstruct their teachings and to some degree their historical development as well. Furthermore, there is an abundance of official documents about sectarian groups in the archives of the Qing dynasty. While the majority of these sources still awaits closer inspection, the research done during the past decades has revealed many facets of Ming and Qing sectarianism. None of the new religious groups succeeded in gaining the position of a state supported orthodox religion and many suffered from persecution. However, they became part of the popular religious culture and showed an amazing vitality that made them a most dynamic religious factor in late imperial China.

The great wave of new religious movements started only in the second half of the Ming dynasty. We may take the year 1509, when Patriarch Luo's *Five Books in Six Volumes* were first printed, as a convenient date to mark its beginning. The most significant innovation of the popular religious traditions founded in late Ming was the proliferation of sectarian scriptures that were printed and openly distributed. Of course, scriptures were also produced and used by earlier sects, but they were anonymous and—more important—usually treated as heterodox writings whose possession and distribution were strictly forbidden by state law. The large-scale printing of sectarian literature in the sixteenth century shows, in contrast, that the religious groups producing these scriptures were at first not perceived as belonging to the type of heterodox religion whose teachings were suppressed by the authorities.

Ming law threatened the propagation of heterodox teachings with severe punishments. Shortly after the founding of the dynasty, an edict banning various forms of popular religious activities had been promulgated. Accordingly, the penal code of the Ming dynasty prescribed execution by strangulation for the leaders of heterodox sects, while their followers were threatened with a hundred strokes with the heavy bamboo and banishment.[1] The law mentioned four sects by name: Maitreya and White Lotus societies, Manichaeism, and the White Cloud tradition. However, it had a general clause that could be applied to almost any popular religious group: "All practices that belong to the *dao* of the left and disrupt the orthodox (*zuodao luanzheng* 左道亂正), those who conceal drawings and images [of buddhas or teachers], burn incense and gather crowds, coming together at night and dispersing at dawn to mislead people under the pretext of doing good works" fell under this law. It is quite obvious that the law aimed at suppressing all forms of popular religious associations; for it was felt necessary to mention explicitly that the prohibition did not apply to local religious societies organizing the spring and autumn sacrifices, even if these involved the gathering of crowds. The implication is that all other forms of religious gatherings were forbidden.

It is an open question to which extent the law was enforced in practice. In any case, it provided a legal frame that could be applied to any religious group considered heterodox. It is, therefore, at least remarkable that it was rarely used to suppress the new religious movements in the sixteenth century. One possible explanation is that their teachings and social composition did not correspond to the common picture of heterodox groups. These new religious movements addressed an audience with some degree of literacy and they were supported by members of the middle class including officials and sometimes even the aristocracy. There was little in their teachings that seemed to be politically subversive. This type of religious movement was clearly different from the heterodox groups preaching the near advent of Maitreya or gathering crowds of uneducated followers. During the early Ming there had been numerous cases in which such sects "rebelled" or were suppressed and there was, therefore, certainly a sensitivity for this kind of heterodox group.[2]

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[1] Cf. *Ming shilu* 明實錄, *Taizu shilu*, *j.* 53, 3a/b (Hongwu 3/6 [1370]); *Ming lü jijie fuli*, *j.* 11: 9b-12a (vol. 3, pp. 934–939).

[2] For rebellions connected with religious groups during the Ming cf. Yung-deh Richard Chu, *An introductory study of the White Lotus sect in Chinese history with special reference*

That the emerging new religious movements were not affected by government measures may, on the other hand, be due to the general decline of state control of religions. Emperor Taizu 太祖 (r. 1368–1398), the founder of the dynasty, attempted not only to suppress all forms of popular religious groups but also to control the Buddhist and Daoist clergy. Following the example of earlier dynasties, he established offices for the registration of Buddhist monks and Daoist priests, restricted the number of ordinations and ordered that before granting an ordination certificate the candidates should be examined.[3] There were, however, many monks and priests who did not stay in official monasteries or temples but lived among the common people and thus escaped state control.[4] It was probably mostly this type of monk and priest who became involved in sectarian activities as many of them wandered around to attract followers. Such unofficial religious practitioners were generally suspected of spreading heterodox teachings. To restrict these activities, state law forbade the building of private temples and the private ordination of monks and priests. Both were threatened with severe punishment.[5] These strict laws to control religious activities of any kind may have had some effects in the early phase of the Ming dynasty when the autocratic rule of emperor Taizu was rigidly enforced. Given the social impact of sectarian teachings during the last decades of the Yuan dynasty, the new Ming government appears to have successfully restrained popular religious activities. Even if it was not possible to completely eliminate popular sects, they rarely acted openly and their influence remained limited. However, less than a century after the founding of the dynasty government control of the religious life decreased considerably. One of the reasons was the large-scale sale of

to peasant movements, New York: Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1967, pp. 103–108; Tao Xisheng 陶希聖, "Mingdai Mile Bailian jiao ji qita »yaozei« 明代彌勒白蓮教及其他《妖賊》," in *Mingdai zongjiao*, edited by Tao Xisheng, Taibei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1968, pp. 5–16; Li Shoukong 李守孔, "Mingdai Bailianjiao kaolüe 明代白蓮教考略," in *Mingdai zongjiao*, edited by Tao Xisheng, Taibei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1968, pp. 17–48; Yu Songqing 喻松青, *Ming Qing Bailianjiao yanjiu* 明清白蓮教研究, Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe, 1987, pp. 3–7. The authors consider all these groups as belonging to the White Lotus tradition. According to ter Haar's thorough analysis (*The White Lotus teachings*, pp. 130–166) of the sources, this interpretation cannot be maintained.

[3] *Mingshi, j.* 74, p. 1817 f; *Ming shilu, Taizu shilu, j.* 86, 8a (Hongwu 6/12 [1373]).

[4] *Ming shilu, Taizu shilu, j.* 209, 1a (Hongwu 24/6 [1391]).

[5] *Ming lü jijie fuli, j.* 4, 7a-9a, pp. 549–553.

certificates for monks and priests to fill the empty coffers of the state.[6] The number of monks and priests increased enormously and finally went out of control. There were countless wandering monks and priests who made a living by offering their services to the people. Under emperor Shizong 世宗 (r. 1522–1566), some Daoists rose to influential positions at court, and the emperor increasingly neglected state affairs and the advice of Confucian officials in his search for immortality.[7] Thus, the general climate was favourable to religious teachers, healers, and also charlatans. These hardly were conditions where the strict laws against religious propagandists were applied rigorously. Only towards the end of the sixteenth century was strict application of the existing laws demanded because monks without certificates, privately built temples, and heterodox sects had become a serious problem.[8] Still in the early seventeenth century, however, officials complained that the number of illegal temples was steadily growing and that monks and priests filled the streets like ants. Many of them were free-lance religious entrepreneurs without any certificate or affiliation to the orthodox institutions.[9] This all suggests that the earlier restrictions had been largely abandoned.

It was against this background that in the sixteenth century the new religious movements emerged. There were countless religious teachers of all kinds trying to attract clients and followers to make a living. This is not to say that they were all charlatans. However, they made religion their profession just like the regularly ordained monks and priests. And they competed with them and with each other for popular support. Some of them were more successful than others in attracting a following. They gathered disciples and founded communities, which were, as it were, sects in the nascent state. Most of these new religious groups never entered the historical records. Yet, there were a few that

[6] Cf. Wang Zhizhong 王志忠, *Ming Qing Quanzhenjiao lungao* 明清全真教論稿 (Ru Dao Shi boshi lunwen congshu), Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2000, pp. 50 f.

[7] Cf. James Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522–1566," in *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part I*, edited by Frederick W. Mote and Denis Twitchett; 7), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 440–510: 479–482; Yang Qiqiao 楊啟樵, "Mingdai zhu di zhi chongshang fangshu ji qi yingxiang 明代諸帝之崇尚方術及其影響," in *Mingdai zongjiao*, edited by Tao Xisheng, Taibei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1968, pp. 203–297: 251–276.

[8] *Ming shilu, Shenzong shilu, j.* 156, 7a (Wanli 12/12 [1584]), *j.* 157, 3b-4a (Wanli 13/1 [1585]).

[9] Cf. Ma Xisha 馬西沙, *Qingdai Bagua jiao* 清代八卦教 (Qingshi yanjiu congshu), Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue Chubanshe, 1989, pp. 34 f.

became prominent because their founders consciously used scriptures as a new method of propagation. This not only allowed them to address a more educated audience, the new media also made the teachings in a certain way independent of the teacher. Sect founders who produced and published books had more in mind than just gathering a small community of disciples. They could spread their teachings geographically and socially to reach people whom they never met in person. Furthermore, religious teachings crystallized to material form survived their authors. The new religious movements based on scriptures did not vanish with the death of their founders, like most other religious groups, but could easily be transmitted and thus gain a historical identity. It was the use of scriptures or, more precisely, the conscious production of new scriptures and the formation of a distinct literary tradition that distinguished the new religious movements of the late Ming from the mass of religious groups and congregations flourishing at the same time. While the latter left few traces in history, the scripture producing sects became the rootstock of religious traditions that lasted for centuries.

In the following chapters I shall introduce some of the new religious movements founded and evolving during the Ming and Qing dynasties. The presentation does not attempt to give a complete historical overview, but instead to describe paradigmatically certain aspects of their teachings and historical development. Although there are significant differences between individual sectarian traditions, there are also some common tendencies that allow to make certain generalizations about their dynamics of development. The last chapter of this part will summarize these more systematic interpretations.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LUO TEACHING: THE SHAPING OF A NEW TRADITION

In the beginning was Patriarch Luo. No other man was venerated more often as founding patriarch of popular religious traditions in the Ming and Qing dynasties than this teacher from Shandong who in the latter half of the fifteenth century started his religious career as a seeker for salvation from the miseries of life and death. His teachings and scriptures became the model for countless successors who during the following centuries spread their religious messages and gathered disciples to form new communities of devout and sometimes ambitious believers. No other popular religious teacher can compare with Patriarch Luo in stimulating the beliefs and lore of the common and educated people.[1] And, of course, no other sectarian tradition received similar attention by modern scholars as the teachings of Patriarch Luo.

Patriarch Luo (Luo zu 羅祖) marks the beginning of a great sectarian wave that swept the sixteenth century and developed into a ceaseless stream of small and large religious communities, which the authorities tried to restrain by ever harsher measures. During the Qing dynasty the history of popular sects became the history of severe persecutions. Yet the vitality of popular religious movements proved to outdo that of the aging dynasty. At the end of the twentieth century late heirs of these movements have surfaced and show the enduring spirit of popular religious traditions.

Although Patriarch Luo marks the beginning of modern Chinese sectarianism, he was not the first who founded a sect nor was his sect the only one that developed from the middle of the Ming dynasty. But his fame as teacher is unsurpassed and little is known about other sect founders in the fifteenth century. No sectarian teacher before left such clear traces of his life and thinking as Patriarch Luo did in his famous *Five Books in Six Volumes* (*Wubu liuce* 五部六冊). Thus, the teachings of

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[1] Popular lore is reflected in Pu Songling's 蒲松齡 story about Patriarch Luo (*Liaozhai zhiyi* 聊齋志異, *j.* 9, Hong Kong: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1963, vol. 2, pp. 479 f).

Patriarch Luo and the traditions that derived from them are a paradigm for early modern sects. I shall use this paradigm to illustrate some structures and processes of sect formation and the unfolding of traditions. It is not intended to describe the development of the Luo Teaching in all its aspects. Many scholars have done and published research on it, and there is no need to repeat these findings in detail. The history of popular religious movements of the Ming and Qing dynasties, in which the Luo tradition plays a major role, is multifarious and vast. Rather than trying to be comprehensive in historical description, I shall try to analyse some typical traits of early modern popular religious movements.

The name "Luo Teaching" is a verbatim translation of *Luo jiao* 羅教, a term often found in official sources. It is synonymous to *Luozu jiao* 羅祖教, "Teaching of Patriarch Luo". In Western works both terms are sometimes rendered as "Luo sects". *Luo jiao* is not the name of a particular sect but a generic term signifying a wide range of different sect organizations flourishing during the last five hundred years. Their common denominator is that they trace their origins back to Patriarch Luo. The names of these sects are numerous and they change during the centuries. They also differ in other respects. Some seem to have remained rather close to the original teaching of Patriarch Luo as transmitted in his scriptures. Others integrated beliefs that were refuted in these very scriptures, and in some cases little more remained than the remembrance of the founding patriarch. The development of the Luo Teaching thus reflects a tendency characteristic for most popular religious movements: the splitting into a wide range of independent groups and organizations. Not only did they lack any overall organization, they also developed independently and acquired distinctive features. This led to a proliferation of countless sectarian groups that in some way were related to each other but in many respects were different. They are related to each other like the members of a family who share a common ancestry. In many cases we can trace sect lineages over centuries. Yet the metaphor of lineages is also misleading, the more so if we should have in mind Chinese patrilinear lineages. For it implies that a particular sectarian group can be assigned to one and only one lineage. It is more appropriate, therefore, to compare sect relationships to family or kinship systems where each individual is related to a number of different lineages. There may be a main line of family descent, but in each generation the relationship to other families becomes more complex. Sometimes a new line is founded, which how-

ever does not completely obliterate kinship relations and common heritage. Thus, each individual has quite a number of ancestors, and the influence of different family traditions makes itself felt in it. The same is true for the countless sectarian groups that appeared in the Ming and Qing. They were usually influenced by many traditions even if they claimed a founding patriarch. As it corresponded to the common Chinese understanding shared by sect members and officials alike to define identities in terms of ancestors and lineages, the founding patriarchs became the most important criterion for the distinction of sect traditions. In this sense it is justified to regard sectarian groups that traced their origin to Patriarch Luo as belonging to the family of *Luo jiao*. However, they were like the branches of an extended family growing and intermarrying with other families over centuries. To have common ancestry does not mean being the same. The development of the *Luo jiao* illustrates these processes of variation and diversification.

1. The Formation of a New Tradition

The man who stands at the beginning of the most important sectarian tradition in early modern China is known by many names. Following Sawada Mizuho, most Western scholars take Luo Qing 羅清 as Patriarch Luo's personal name. Sawada relies on two sect scriptures of the late Ming.[2] In other texts from about the same time, Patriarch Luo's name is given as Luo Jing[3] 羅靜 and Luo Yin[4] 羅因, and a text of the Qing dynasty has Luo Ying 羅英.[5] All these names sound similar and the

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[2] Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穗, *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū* 增補寶卷の研究, Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1975, p. 302. Sawada refers to the *Hunyuan Hongyang linfan Piaogao jing* 混元弘陽臨凡飄高經 (cf. *BJCJ*, vol. 17, p. 149) and the *Foshuo sanhuang chufen tiandi tanshi baojuan* 佛説三皇初分天地嘆世寶卷. At least the first of these scriptures does not belong to the *Luo jiao* tradition, the second was not available to me.

[3] *Zangyi jingshu* 藏逸經書, by Mizang Daokai 密藏道開 (Songlin congshu 松鄰叢書; 3), n.p., 1917, 10b.

[4] *Taishang zushi sanshi yinyou zonglu* 太上組師三世因由總錄, *j*.1, 6a. I have used an edition of 1875 with a preface dated 1682, which seems to be identical with the edition reprinted in *MJZJ*, vol. 6. I refer to this text in the notes by its short title *Sanshi yinyou*.

[5] For an (incomplete) list of names by which the Patriarch Luo is mentioned in various sources cf. Zheng Zhiming 鄭志明, *Wusheng laomu xinyang suyuan* 無生老母信仰溯源, Taibei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1985, pp. 16 f. The author lists twenty different names.

differences may be due to misunderstandings, which often occur in oral traditions. According to Luo Delin 羅德林, a direct descendent of Patriarch Luo's who was interrogated by officials in 1768, the name of his ancestor was Luo Menghong 羅夢鴻.[6] The same name, written with different characters (羅孟洪) is corroborated in another official document[7] and—again written with different characters 羅孟鴻—in the preface to the 1613 edition of one of Luo's own writings.[8] This is ample evidence that his personal name was Luo Menghong. The names Luo Qing and Luo Jing seem to be religious styles possibly derived from the expression *qingjing wuwei* 清靜無為 (pure and still non-action), which was regarded as the essence of his teaching.[9]

An outline of Luo Menghong's biography can be reconstructed from a number of sources.[10] He was born in 1443 and died 1527 at the age of eighty-five.[11] His native place was in Shandong province, Jimo

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[6] *JJCLFZZ*, Qianlong 33/9/21 (1768) memorial by Yang Tingzhang 楊廷璋, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 172.

[7] Memorial by Zhang Bao 彰寶, Qianlong 33/10/1 (1768), in *Shiliao xunkan*, Beijing: Jinghua yinshuju, 1930–1931, no. 15, p. 526b.

[8] *Kugong wudao juan* 苦功悟道卷, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, p. 38.

[9] Cf. memorial of Zhang Bao, Qianlong 33/10/1 (1768), in *Shiliao xunkan*, no. 15, 526b.

[10] For the following cf. Richard Hon-chun Shek, *Religion and society in late Ming: sectarianism and popular thought in sixteenth and seventeenth century China*, Berkeley: Ph.D. thesis, University of California, 1980, pp. 202–232; Randall L. Nadeau, *Popular sectarianism in the Ming: Lo Ch'ing and his Religion of Non-Action*, Vancouver: Ph.D. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990, pp. 13–87; Zheng Zhiming, *Wusheng laomu xinyang suyuan*, pp. 16–25; Ma/Han, pp. 166–173; Wang Jianchuan 王見川, *Taiwan de Zhaijiao yu luantang* 臺灣的齋教與鸞堂, Taibei: Nantian Shuju, 1996, pp. 3–9. The earliest Western account of Patriarch Luo's life is J.J.M. De Groot, *Sectarianism and religious persecution in China. A page in the history of religions*, Amsterdam, 1903 (Taipei 1970), pp. 181–196.

[11] De Groot (*Sectarianism*, p. 194) has 1563 to 1647. This is obviously an error. The source he relies on gives the date of Patriarch Luo's death as 29th day of the second month in the year *dinghai* (p. 184). 1647 is a *dinghai* year, but also 1527. The year Jiajing 6 (1527) is given in the *Taishang zushi sanshi yinyou zonglu*, *j.* 1, 29a (Preface dated 1682). The *Foshuo sanhuang chufen diandi tanshi baojuan* (quoted by Sawada, *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū*, pp. 304) has the same year, albeit with a different day: 29th of the first month. The dates of Luo Menghong's birth and death are given in *Bei Tanzhou Luo zu bujuan zhuisiji* 北檀州羅祖部卷追思記 of 1613 (in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, pp. 41 f): He was born in the seventh year of the Zhengtong era (1442) and died in the *dinghai* year of the Jiajing era (1527). According to the *Zushi xingjiao shizi miaosong* 祖師行腳十子妙頌 (in *Kugong wudao baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao* 苦功悟道寶卷補註開心法要, vol. 1, Taizhong: Minde Tang, 1980, p. 14), a biography that dates back to the end of the 16th century, he was born on the first day of the 12th month of the seventh year of the Zhengtong era. This was the 1st of January 1443.

county 即墨縣, where he was born into a family of hereditary soldiers. He lost his mother at the age of three and his father when he was five years old. After growing up in the family of his uncle, he entered the army to serve in the region of Miyun 密雲 garrison about 70 kilometres northeast of Peking. In 1470, when he was 28 years old, he became a religious seeker who studied with various teachers. After thirteen years of restless search for deliverance from suffering, he finally reached enlightenment in 1482 at the age of forty. What followed was the career of a religious teacher who gathered many disciples and gained fame in Shandong and the capital region. It seems that his success in winning a wide following among the populace attracted the suspicion of the authorities, for according to several legendary accounts he was imprisoned in Peking. It was during his time in jail that he supposedly wrote his famous *Five Books in Six Volumes* (*Wubu liuce* 五部六冊), which became the most popular sectarian writings of the following centuries. He finally was released from jail, apparently with the help of palace eunuchs who were among his followers. In 1509 his *Five Books in Six Volumes* were first printed, which indicates that he was supported by influential friends. After his death in 1527 he was buried in Tanzhou 檀州 prefecture in the north of Peking[12] near Miyun. Near his tomb a pagoda was built and a stele erected to honour the deceased teacher.[13]

Later traditions narrate many more details of Patriarch Luo's life and describe him as a miracle worker who defeated a foreign army and prevailed in a debate with a monk from Tibet. There are also traditions that he was received by the emperor who finally bestowed an imperial certificate (*longpai* 龍牌) to protect his *Five Books in Six Volumes*.[14] Luo Menghong himself was transformed into a superhuman saviour, an incarnation of the Venerable Ancient Buddha (*Lao Gufo* 老古佛) who took human form for the salvation of mankind.[15]

In his autobiography, which is contained in the *Kugong wudao juan* 苦功悟道卷 (*Scroll on Enlightenment through Bitter Effort*), the first of his *Wubu liuce*, Luo's personality emerges with very human traits. He de-

[12] *Bei Tanzhou Luo zu bujuan zhuisiji*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, p. 48.

[13] The pagoda and the stele still existed when in 1768 they were discovered during an official investigation. They were then destroyed. *JJCLFZZ*, Qianlong 33/9/21 (1768) by the governor of Zhili, Yang Tingzhang 楊廷璋, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 172.

[14] *Sanshi yinyou*, *j.* 1, 26b-27a. For these legendary accounts cf. Nadeau, *Popular Sectarianism in the Ming*, pp. 49–74; Shek, *Religion and society in late Ming*, pp. 213–222.

[15] *Zushi xingjiao shizi miaosong*, p. 14.

scribes his intense suffering from the impermanence of human life and his feeling of loneliness because of the early loss of his parents. The loss of his parents appears to have been a traumatic experience, which led him yearn for a secure home to return to.

> When birth-and-death arrives, these four material elements [of the body] turn into ashes and earth. Suddenly I started to think of this soul of mine. The stinking bag of skin that is given birth to by one's parents is an accumulation of pus and blood. This soul, where does it come from, who gave birth to it? The thought arouse that I have no refuge and my heart was full of distress.[16]

> Oxen and horses, pigs and sheep, the flying birds and the quadrupeds, they all have parents who gave birth to them. For strangers who are far away there is a day when they return. Also soldiers who serve thousands of miles away have a home place where they can stay. Why is it only this soul of mine that has no home place?[17]

"Returning home" was a standard metaphor for salvation not only in Luo Menghong's writings but in many popular religious movements. At the age of twenty-eight he started his thirteen year long search for delivery from the endless circle of *saṃsāra*. He became a religious seeker. First he went into the solitude of the mountains to feed himself on the seeds of pines and cypresses. This Daoist method of reaching long life frustrated him and did not bring relief from the dread of *saṃsāra*. The next step of his seekership was prompted by a friend who told him of an enlightened teacher. He went there to accept him as master. The master taught him to recite the name of Amitābha and told him that the Buddha was his eternal parents (*Wusheng Fumu* 無生父母). This teaching did not satisfy him because he had doubts that his eternal parents in the other world of heaven could hear him. After eight years of devotion to Amitābha, he finally left this master and started to study the *Jin'gang keyi* 金剛科儀 (*Clarification of the Meaning of the Diamond Sūtra*),[18] which he had heard monks reciting on the occasion

[16] *Kugong wudao juan,* in *BJCJ,* vol. 1, pp. 97 f; cf. the slightly different translation by Daniel L. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes. An introduction to Chinese sectarian scriptures from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series; 49), Cambridge; London: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 97.

[17] *Kugong wudao juan,* in *BJCJ,* vol. 1, pp. 104 f

[18] For the *Jin'gang jing keyi* cf. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes,* pp. 34–38.

of a funeral. He studied the scripture and practised meditation for three years without finding delivery from the cycle of birth and death.[19]

Before the autobiography proceeds to the description of the final steps in his advancement to enlightenment, Luo Menghong enumerates the spiritual methods available to him that all did not bring the release he was longing for. He practised sitting meditation and recited the name of the Buddha in four characters and in six characters. He found the heterodox method (*xie fa* 邪法) of emitting the *yang* spirit (*chu yangsheng* 出陽神) to be of no use, nor the practice of *samādhi*, Daoist meditation practices[20] or methods to prognosticate one's life-span. "All these various methods cannot help when one approaches death. Fearing the suffering of the cycles of birth and death, I did not want to give up my search and moved one further step."[21]

What follows is the gradual attainment of insight into the mystery of human existence. He realizes that True Emptiness (*zhenkong* 真空) is the only reality, the *dharma* body of all buddhas. The whole cosmos is one single body.

> Suddenly, accomplishing one step, my heart was full of great joy. I realized that there is no returning to nonbeing nor is there returning to being, I am True Emptiness. The Mother (*niang* 娘) is I and I am the Mother, essentially there is no duality. The inner is empty, the outer is empty, I am True Emptiness.[22]

However, this insight still did not bring full spiritual liberation and self-reliance.

> Day and night I was distressed. In my dreams I wept for grief, moving [the compassion of] Emptiness (*xukong* 虛空). The Venerable True Emptiness (*lao zhenkong* 老真空) showed great compassion and from the south-west emitted a bright light absorbing my body in its radiance. In the dreams this experience vanished and because it had vanished my distress found no end. Then, when I was sitting in meditation facing the southwest, suddenly the blossom of my heart became apparent, the ground of my heart opened up and I fully understood the landscape of the native place

[19] The various methods practised by Luo Menghong before he reached enlightenment are mentioned in is autobiography: *Kugong wudao juan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, pp. 106–128.

[20] He mentions the methods "nourishment of the jewels" (*yang bao* 養寶) and "three passes" (*san guan* 三關).

[21] *Kugong wudao juan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, p. 130.

[22] *Kugong wudao juan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, pp. 150 f.

(*bendi fenguang* 本地風光). Only now I had attained ease and self-reliance, only now I had attained self-reliant peace and security.[23]

This personal experience of enlightenment removed all his former suffering. His feeling of loneliness and forlornness was overcome when he became aware of being united with the ultimate reality. Luo Menghong became convinced that he had found the only way to salvation and started to spread this teaching. In his writings he elaborates his basic insight of the fundamental unity of all, which terminates any distinction.

The symbol used in the *Kugong wudao juan* to denote the Absolute is *Zhenkong* (True Emptiness). Although it seems to be an abstract concept reminiscent of the Mahāyāna idea of *śūnyatā*, Luo Menghong describes it also in personal terms as Venerable True Emptiness and further identifies it with the Mother. It is a creative principle that has brought forth all that exists through his own transformation.[24] Thus, his understanding of Emptiness is different from the Mahāyāna idea. If later interpreters considered Luo's teaching as a variant of Chan Buddhism, they ignored some of its central elements.

There is a certain development of ideas and terminology in his writings. The ultimate reality, which he first calls *Zhenkong* (True Emptiness) is later referred to as *Wuji* 無極 (Limitless) or *Wuji Shengzu* 無極聖祖 (Holy Patriarch Limitless). *Wuji Shengzu* is described as a personal deity that is the source of all being. Out of compassion it transforms itself into various manifestations to save all living beings from the suffering of *saṃsāra*.[25] As before, the origin of all being is also called "mother" (*mu* 母 or *niang* 娘). All things, buddhas and scriptures, human beings and the ten thousand things are mere names.

All these names flow out of a single character. This one character is *Mother* (*mu*). The Mother is the Patriarch and the Patriarch is the Mother.[26]

[23] *Kugong wudao juan,* in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, pp. 153 f.

[24] *Kugong wudao juan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, pp. 175–181. For Luo's cosmological ideas see his *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao* 巍巍不動太山深根結果寶卷補注開心法 (Wubu liuce jingjuan 五部六冊經卷; 13), Taizhong: Minde Tang, 1980, *j.* 4, ch. 17. The central symbols used there for the Absolute are *wuji* (Limitless) and *taiji* (Great Ultimate).

[25] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan* 正信除疑無修証自在寶卷, edition of Wanli 29 (1601), reprinted 1678 and 1882 (*BJCJ*, vol. 3, p. 91).

[26] *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao, j.* 1, ch. 4, p. 88. Pages of this section are missing in the copy of the *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan* reprinted in *Baojuan chuji*, vol. 3 stored in the collection of Leipzig University

The Patriarch referred to in this passage seems to be the Holy Patriarch Limitless (*Wuji Shengzu*), but the text allows to understand it as a reference to Patriarch Luo himself and thus to regard him as a divine manifestation of the Mother, as his later followers did. As the terminology of the *Wubu liuce* is inconsistent and different symbols and metaphors are used to denote the same ultimate reality, the writings are open to interpretation. It is hardly possible, therefore, to reconstruct the "original" meaning of Patriarch Luo's teachings, which most scholars regard as being close to Chan Buddhism. This understanding is promoted by the interpretation of Lanfeng 蘭風 written towards the end of the 16th century and published as a commentary *Kaixin fayao* 開心法要 (*Essentials of the Dharma to Open the Mind*) to Luo's writings.[27] Lanfeng is introduced as a Chan monk in the twenty-sixth generation of the Linji 臨濟 school. His commentary presents Patriarch Luo's teaching as in full accordance with Chan Buddhism. However, in the preface of its 1652 edition Patriarch Luo is already regarded as a human manifestation of *Wuji Shengzu* who was later followed by another incarnation named Ying Ji'nan 應繼南.[28] The deification of Patriarch Luo as a manifestation of the creative principle of the universe was a clear departure from Buddhist orthodoxy. There is no evidence in Luo Menghong's writings that he encouraged his own deification. Still, it is probably misleading to regard his teaching merely as a popular variant of traditional Buddhist doctrines. It is true that Luo Menghong's writings show a deep Buddhist influence and many of his contemporary and later followers probably considered his teachings as orthodox Buddhism. But it is equally true that Luo Menghong is the founder of a new religious movement who explicitly rejected Buddhist practice as a way to salvation. He saw himself as a teacher who had experienced enlightenment and found his own way to overcome the cycle of birth-and-death. In his understanding his teaching was by no means one among many other Buddhist methods to reach salvation, but the only one. He was the founder of a new religious movement, not of a new school within the Buddhist

Library. Since the *Baojuan chuji* edition of this text seems to be a collage of different prints (see pp. 446 f, 643–647), I generally do not refer to this edition.

[27] This commentary is included in the *Kaixin fayao* 開心法要 edition of the *Wubu liuce*, which was published by Wang Yuanjing 王源靜 1596 and reprinted in 1652. A modern edition has been published in 1980 by the Minde tang 民德堂 temple in Taizhong under the title *Wubu liuce jingjuan* 五部六冊經卷.

[28] *Kugong wudao baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao*, vol. 1, *shou* 首, pp. 7 f.—Ying Ji'nan (alias Yin Ji'nan 殷繼南) was the second patriarch of the *Laoguan zhaijiao*.

saṃgha. Although his teachings were influenced by Buddhist ideas more than by any other tradition, his movement was never accepted as orthodox Buddhism by the official *saṃgha*. To be sure, there were monks among his followers, and Luo's writings contain little that might have seemed to be revolutionary or politically subversive, but the movement stood clearly apart from orthodox Buddhism.

Some scholars have argued that Patriarch Luo's teachings and the movement that grew out of it were indeed Buddhist and in a certain sense even more "orthodox" than most other forms of Buddhism, since no concessions to other ideologies were made.[29] This is possibly true if we construct an idealized type of what Buddhism "really" is. Then, Luo's teaching may be nearer to this ideal than many forms of popular Buddhist beliefs and practices of his time. However, orthodoxy and heterodoxy are not defined by historians of religion, but by those whose claim to orthodoxy is backed by political power. In China, this means that orthodox Buddhism was that form of Buddhism which the political elites supported or at least tolerated at a given time. By this standard, Luo Menghong's movement was heterodox, since it was repeatedly criticized by the spokesmen of orthodox Buddhism. They also criticized fellow monks who supported Luo's teaching such as Lanfeng and Daning 大寧, who was a direct disciple of Luo's.[30] The appeal of Luo's teachings to ordained Buddhist monks shows how thin the line between orthodoxy and heterodoxy was. It certainly was difficult to discern for most who were attracted by the genuine religious message of the *Wubu liuce* and its doctrine of salvation. However, it was not primarily a matter of doctrine that made Luo's movement heretical, but its independence of the clerical structures of state supported Buddhism.

Although there were monks among Luo's followers, his movement was basically a lay movement. The monks were not different from lay followers in that they, likewise, accepted Patriarch Luo as their teacher. Unlike Mao Ziyuan in the Song dynasty, who had also founded a lay movement, Luo Menghong had not been ordained as a monk and had a wife and children. A religious community with a layman as teacher of monks was contrary to all rules of the *saṃgha*. Such a movement by definition could not be part of orthodox Buddhism. In the case of traditional Buddhism we must avoid a modern understanding of religion

[29] Cf. ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, p. 293.

[30] Cf. *Zangyi jingshu* 藏逸經書, 11a/b.

as being primarily a matter of individual religious awareness and piety. Certainly, there was ample room for devotion and individual search for salvation within the Buddhist tradition, but as an institutionalized religion Buddhism was represented by the *saṃgha.* For Luo Menghong, however, the *saṃgha* was irrelevant, the distinction between monks and laypersons had—as any distinction—no bearing for the ultimate concern of salvation. For him, there is no need for Buddha, *dharma,* or *saṃgha* in the usual sense, for they are contained in the mind:

> What concerns the Three Jewels (*san bao* 三寶): If one's own nature is fully understood, it is called the Buddha Jewel. If one's own nature is fully realized, it is called the *Dharma* Jewel. If one's own nature is clear and pure, it is called the *Saṃgha* Jewel. Apart from this mind, one cannot speak of the Three Jewels, there is no such thing.[31]

The main part of this passage is a verbatim quotation from Pudu's *Lushan Lianzong baojian* (*Precious Mirror of the Lotus School on Mount Lu*).[32] While this shows Luo's closeness to the old White Lotus tradition, it must be observed that he added the last sentence, which negates any conventional understanding of the Three Jewels. Unlike Pudu, Luo consciously departs from the clerical institutions of Buddhism. For him, the mind (*xin* 心, lit. "heart") alone contains the Three Jewels and everything that is needed for entering the path of salvation.[33] Everyone can reach it when he or she realizes their unity with the ultimate reality:

> I urge you monks and nuns to stop vilifying the correct teaching.
> Laymen and lay women, stop reviling the true scriptures.
> The four types of devotees, disciples of the Buddha, should all accept [this teaching].
> Whether they have left household life or not, all partake in one single body which is emptiness.
> The children of one mother, if they are seven or eight, they still have one single mother.
> Heaven and earth embrace everything and are produced by one single pneuma (*qi* 氣).
> The water that you drink and the water that I drink is originally the mother's milk.

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[31] *Poxie xianzheng baojing* 破邪顯正寶經, in *BJCJ*, vol. 2, pp. 119 f.

[32] *Lushan Lianzong baojing* (T 1973), *j.* 10, p. 345b.

[33] *Poxie xianzheng baojing,* in *BJCJ*, vol. 2, pp. 117 f.

> Those who have left household life and those who have not are produced by one single force.
> As long as there is distinction between self and other, there will be life-and-death (i.e., *saṃsāra*).
> Only if one returns to the light and lets reflect the illumination, everyone will attain perfection.
> The Great Emptiness embraces everything, originally there is no duality.
> Children of one mother stop making distinctions and together you will escape destruction.[34]

Luo here addresses Buddhist clerics and laypersons to stop vilifying his teaching. This shows that he was not accepted as a teacher of Buddhism by most of his Buddhist contemporaries, even if some of his followers may have regarded him as such. The opposition of the Buddhists is easy to understand for Luo rejected all conventional Buddhist practices:

> Whether one is monk or lay person: meditation, observing *vinaya* rules, reciting *sūtras*, vegetarianism, pilgrimage to sacred mountains, repairing monasteries, erecting pagodas and Buddha statues, offerings to the Buddha, melting the images of demons in fire, printing *sūtras*, making images: such practices are like playing with puppets.[35]

That is, they are without any effect. They cannot bring liberation from the wheel of birth and death.[36]

From its very beginning, the movement founded by Luo Menghong obviously formed an independent religious community that stood in opposition to the Buddhism of its time. Luo leaves no doubt that his enlightenment had revealed to him the only way to salvation and that all practices propagated by other religious groups were without effect. Salvation is possible only for those who follow his teaching. His followers were members of a community of elects who were destined to attain ultimate liberation, while those outside the community were without hope for deliverance.

> This marvellous teaching! You will not attain the immeasurable fortune if you do not meet this marvellous teaching. Those who are destined (*youyuan*

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[34] *Poxie xianzheng baojing*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 2, pp. 75–78. Translation based on Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, p. 113, with modifications.

[35] *Poxie xianzheng baojing*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 2, pp. 248 f.

[36] For another passage declaring all possible religious practices (not only Buddhist) as futile cf. *Tan shi wuwei baojuan* 嘆世無為寶卷, ch. 10, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, pp. 477–493.

> 有緣) will come to it even if they are a thousand miles away. Those who are not destined will not meet it even if it is right before their face.[37]

This passage discloses a spirit of sectarian exclusiveness that calls to mind the idea of the chosen people in medieval Daoist and Buddhist eschatological movements. Compare the following passage of the *Zhengming jing:*

> Those who are destined through their karma (*you yinyuan* 有因緣) to this Law will find it even if they are ten thousand miles away; those who are not destined to this Law will remain deaf even if the drum is beaten right by their side.[38]

The similarity of the formulations may be a coincidence, but it is evident that Luo preached a doctrine of chosenness much like earlier sects. Far from teaching universal salvation for all beings, he urged his hearers to adhere exclusively to the way revealed by him. Those who do not follow his teaching will suffer in hell:

> This highest, profound, and marvellous teaching: stupid and mean people do not accept it. Superior people do accept it and return home [i.e., will be saved] while the mean people will suffer the horror of hell.[39]

It is faith in his teaching that alone offers the path to salvation:

> Those whose heart has faith and relies on me will return home, while those who have no faith will suffer in *saṃsāra*. Those whose heart has faith will be protected by the Limitless (*wuji*), while those who have no faith will fall into lower forms of existence.[40]

Like many sectarian teachers before and after him, Luo Menghong taught that only members of his own sect will be saved. Such a doctrine cannot expect to be hailed by the teachers of other religions. Luo not only declared all practices of Buddhism to be useless, he also sharply attacked other popular religious movements.[41] He explicitly mentions *Bailian jiao* (White Lotus Teaching)[42] *Mile jiao* 彌勒教 (Maitreya Teach-

[37] *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao*, *j.* 1, ch. 3, pp. 71–73.

[38] *Puxian pusa shuo zhengming jing* (T 2879), p. 1366b, lines 1–3. Cf. above p. 146.

[39] *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao*, *j.* 1, ch. 3, p. 86.

[40] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan* 正信除疑無修證自在寶卷, ch. 11, in *BJCJ*, vol. 3, pp. 146 f.

[41] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan*, ch. 18 f, in *BJCJ*, vol. 3, pp. 240–260.

[42] Luo does not seem to be very familiar with the *Bailian jiao* for he misspells it 白

ing) and *Xuangu jiao* 玄鼓教 (Teaching of the Dark Drum).[43] All these, in his opinion, are evil teachings whose followers will not escape hell after death.

Luo's criticism of Buddhist practices and popular religious groups shows that his religious biography did not end with his own enlightenment. One could imagine that the realization of his union with the ultimate reality and the peace of mind that this insight brought to him would have turned him into a person who did not care any more about the distinctions of the ordinary world and the unenlightened behaviour of other people. There was no need to attack other teachings when after thirteen years of seekership he had found what he had been desperately searching for. His outspoken criticism of other teachings has nothing to do with his own quest for salvation but must be understood against the background of his career as a sect leader. Soon after his own enlightenment in 1482[44] he started to attract a following. He devoted the rest of his life to the propagation of his teaching, which he did very consciously and systematically. A major factor for his success as a religious teacher were his writings, collectively known as *Five Books in Six Volumes* (*Wubu liuce*). We do not know exactly when these books were written. According to one tradition of the early Qing dynasty, he dictated the books to his two disciples Fuen 福恩 and Fubao 福報 while he was in prison.[45] However, there is no confirmation of this information in other sources, and the account of Patriarch Luo's life given in the *Sanshi yinyou* 三世因由 (*Vitae [of the Patriarchs] in Three Generations*) has many legendary traits that make it unreliable. It is improbable that the *Five Books in Six Volumes* were written within a short time. Rather it seems that they were the cumulative product of Luo's teachings, which may have been recorded and edited by some of

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縴教 (instead of 白蓮教). He further explains that its followers pray to sun and moon, burn paper images and use magic water to tell the fortune (p. 244). Probably the sect Luo has in mind was one of the many popular sects generally classified as *Bailian jiao.*

[43] Followers of the *Xuangu jiao* are described to revere sun and moon as parents (p. 259 f). The sect is occasionally mentioned in other sources, but no details are known (cf. below note 4 on p. 270).

[44] In *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao, j.* 1, ch. 1, p. 36 he mentions followers who belonged to his school for "thirty, forty or fifty years". As the scripture was first published in 1509, this would mean that he had disciples since about 1460, which, considering his biography, seems impossible. However, it is clear that Luo attracted followers very early, probably soon after his experience of enlightenment.

[45] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 1, 15a-16b.

his disciples.[46] In any case, Luo regarded these scriptures as containing the essence of his teachings, which provide the only certain way to salvation:

> These scriptures in five books of mine, their root is not more than two sentences or four sentences.[47] These scriptures in five books of mine contain the marvellous law in countless sentences, but only two sentences or four sentences suffice to return home. These scriptures in five books of mine contain countless sentences. [However] salvation [lit. "to return home"] is easy to attain without wasting energy and time. If the wise men listen [to these sentences] one single time, their heart will be thoroughly enlightened and they will never stumble. Foolish[48] men may listen to them even thousands of times and they will only regard it as idle talk.[49]

Luo Menghong was very conscious of his role as a teacher and leader of a religious community. He was the first sectarian leader who wrote books to propagate his teachings.[50] Thus, his *Five Books in Six Volumes* mark the beginning of a new development in Chinese popular religion. After Luo, countless *baojuan* 寶卷 (precious scrolls) were produced by sectarian leaders, many of which were printed and thus made sectarian teachings available to a wide readership. The emergence of popular religious movements during the Ming and Qing dynasties and their increasing social impact is not least prompted by the increasing availability of printed sectarian writings. Luo Menghong's activities set the example for this tremendous development. Even during his lifetime the *Five Books in Six Volumes* were printed thrice (1509, 1514, 1518), and until the end of the Ming dynasty there were at least twenty-four more printings and new editions.[51] The use of books as an effective means of

[46] There may be a true element in the tradition that the *Wubu liuce* were recorded by the two disciples Fuen and Fubao following Luo's oral instructions. Luo's known biography does not suggest that he was very educated. Although his writings are not of a refined literary style they contain many quotations from Buddhist and classical scriptures, which implies some literary education. Possibly his disciples edited and polished his sayings.

[47] The "two sentences" or "four sentences" seem to refer to mantras.

[48] Reading 笨 for 坌.

[49] *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao, j.* 1, ch. 1, pp. 45 f. Cf. Nadeau's translation (*Popular sectarianism in the Ming*, p. 146).

[50] Of course, sectarian writings were produced continuously since the Han dynasty. However, they usually do not have a known author but were presented as revealed scriptures.

[51] For a list of known editions of the *Wubu liuce* cf. Wang Jianchuan 王見川, "«Wubu liuce» kanke lüebiao《五部六冊》刊刻略表," *Minjian zongjiao*, 1, pp. 161–172.

propagation shows that Luo's audience belonged to the middle layer of society where literacy was common. Among the followers who were distinguished enough to contribute to the posthumous lines of homage inscribed on the stele at the pagoda near Luo's tomb were officials, Buddhist monks, and a Daoist priest.[52] Patriarch Luo was a respected person when he died in 1527. His writings were known not only in small sectarian circles but were widely read. He was the most successful sect founder of the Ming and Qing dynasties whose influence continues up to the present day.

While his writings give us a fairly comprehensive impression of his teachings, not much is known about the organization of his religious movement. Certainly not all of his followers belonged to the higher levels of society. Attractive as his teaching was for educated people, who could take it as a kind of radical Chan Buddhism, it was not intellectually sophisticated and therefore easy to understand even for the less educated. Although Luo quotes Buddhist scriptures much more than Confucian and Daoist writings and certainly understood his teaching as founded in Buddhism,[53] no particular knowledge of Buddhism was needed to understand it. His aim was not to propagate Buddhist philosophy nor Buddhist practice and institutions, but to communicate his own insight. He did so using symbols that were known to everyone roughly familiar with elementary notions of the three teachings. One did not need to be a Buddhist to have an idea of what Amitābha and his Pure Land mean, nor was it necessary to have a Confucian education to have heard of *Wuji* and *Taiji.* The language of the *Five Books in Six Volumes* uses symbols that were generally known even to those who had only a vague idea of their intellectual origins and history. And Luo himself felt free to make use of traditional concepts without caring much about their technical meaning in the various traditions. Thus, he could equate *Zhenkong* with *Wuji,* and conceive *Wuji* as a creator deity *Wuji Shengzu.* He did not hesitate to introduce symbols drawn from popular religion, such as *Mother* (*niang, mu*), to refer to the same concept, and he saw no need to eliminate internal contradictions and inconsistencies in his writings. Those who wanted to understand his teachings as a new vision of Chan Buddhist teachings of emptiness

[52] Cf. *Beijing zhongshi zan zuta zhi wen* 北京眾士讚祖塔之文, appended to the 1670 reprint of *Kugong wudao juan,* in *BJCJ,* vol. 1, pp. 242 ff.

[53] Luo's sources have been thoroughly analysed by Nadeau, *Popular Sectarianism in the Ming,* pp. 224–274 and Zheng Zhiming, *Wusheng laomu xinyang suyuan,* pp. 221–253.

could easily do so, while those who were attracted by more concrete symbols of the Ultimate could find a compassionate deity. Because Luo used well-known symbols of the three teachings and of popular traditions, which for almost anyone had some meaning, his audience could easily find familiar ideas that seemed to confirm existing beliefs. Luo referred to other traditions and their texts, and clearly was inspired by their language and example, but brought about a new synthesis founded on the authority of his personal enlightenment. By assigning new meanings to traditional concepts, he allowed his hearers to remain within a conventional symbol system and at the same time to be attracted by the vigour of his own religious message.

Luo took up ideas and symbols that were widespread and accepted in the cultural milieus he was addressing. Yet this alone does not explain his success. Anyone who was looking for spiritual experience and insight into the emptiness of all duality could turn to Chan Buddhism. However, Chan Buddhism was integrated in Buddhist institutions. Although in theory the distinction between monks and lay believers was without significance for salvation, in practice there was a difference between monks and laypersons. Chan monks were part of a clerical structure controlled by a state jealously observing all independent organizations and limiting the number of monks. Luo offered a teaching that made clerical institutions superfluous. Not only could everyone who wished to do so become a member of his religious community, they could do so without abandoning their family and profession. Unrestrained by the precepts of monastic life they could satisfy their religious needs and follow a teacher who promised salvation simply through belief in his message. It was an easy way that did not demand ascetic practices nor sumptuous rituals, but offered salvation "without wasting energy and time." While Luo offered similar rewards as conventional Buddhism, he did so at considerably lower costs. Such a teaching did not fail to attract followers.

Luo propagated his teachings mostly in the region of Miyun northeast of Peking. Miyun was situated at the Chaohe river 潮何川, which connected the region with Tongzhou 通州 and thus was the northern extension of the Grand Canal.[54] It seems that among his followers were soldiers stationed in this militarily important part of the capital region. Since Luo Menghong himself had been a soldier he knew this social milieu and probably had many contacts with it. Lanfeng remarks

[54] Cf. *Mingshi* 明史, *j.* 86, p. 2109.

in his eulogy of Patriarch Luo that after his death his coffin was paid by two officials, among them a Regional Commander (*zongbing guan* 總兵官), which shows his connection with the local military.[55] It is possible that even during Luo's lifetime he had followers among the boatmen of the Grand Canal, who carried his teaching to south China where it is attested a few decades after his death. In any case, his disciples belonged both to the higher and lower classes, as Lanfeng notes, although we have no exact information about the social background of those who were not prominent enough to be mentioned in the sources.

According to an account by Nayancheng 那彥成, who as Governor of Zhili made a thorough investigation into sectarian activities in the early 19th century, Luo lived with his family in Shixia 石匣, about twenty kilometres northwest of Miyun. "Many people came from far away and offered presents to him, and he thus became rich."[56] Although this is a late source, it is probably correct in describing Luo as a teacher whose fame reached far and attracted disciples from distant places. It was common for disciples to make presents to their teacher and it seems that Luo was sufficiently supported to devote his life to his teaching activities. Whether he "became rich," as Nayancheng states, must be left open to question, but his connections with officials and other members of the privileged classes suggest that he was not poor. Like so many sectarian leaders after him, he made teaching his profession, which secured him social status and income. Thus, he had turned from a religious seeker into a religious entrepreneur who consciously and intentionally propagated his teachings and organized a following. As we have noted above, an important means for the dissemination of his teachings were his scriptures. While some of those who were attracted by them may not have been in direct contact with Luo, many others became disciples after having sought his personal instruction and joining his religious community. Although Luo declared all conventional religious practice as useless for the aim of salvation, he expected his followers to observe certain precepts, such as abstinence from meat and liquor.[57] The community had at least one building as a place for preaching and

[55] *Zushi xingjiao shizi miao song,* in *Kugong wudao baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao, j.* 1, p. 15.

[56] *JJCLFZZ,* Jiaqing 21/3/21 (1816), memorial by Nayancheng 那彥成, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 247.

[57] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan,* ch. 2, in *BJCJ,* vol. 3, pp. 38 f. The text speaks of people who "have received the *dao*" (*dele dao* 得了道), which may refer to some kind of initiation into the community.

possibly rituals.[58] Mizang Daokai 密藏道開, a Buddhist monk who critically reports on Luo's sect, notes that there were rituals of initiation at midnight when a secret mantra, hand gestures, and specific methods of silent recitation were revealed that would assure liberation from suffering.[59] Mizang wrote many decades after Luo's death and he may well refer to practices of later sects or even reproduce stereotypes about secret sectarian rituals. However, Luo's own scriptures contain allusions to such secret rituals. The opening of the Heavenly Eye (*tianyan* 天眼)[60] and of the Mysterious Pass (*xuanguan* 玄關) would bring insight and make hard practice and meditation superfluous. The text mentions a mantra of four sentences whose complete understanding will enable to overcome the end of the three *kalpas*.[61]

Although the allusions to such secret practices are rather cryptic, they are clear enough to see that Luo offered rituals that would secure insight and liberation without the hardship he had suffered himself during thirteen years. Against this background, his remark that according to his teaching salvation "is easy to attain without wasting energy and time" presents itself in a different light. When he states that it is sufficient to listen "one single time"[62] to the two or four sentences that contain the essence of his scriptures to reach salvation, he probably refers to ritual formulas that were used during initiation. The technical term for initiation is *de dao* 得道 ("to attain the *dao*"). Luo repeatedly assures that those who have been initiated (*dedao ren* 得道人) and are members of his community (*daozhong ren* 道中人) will be saved.[63] As has been noted above, Luo criticized all other religious practices as futile. They all cannot avoid being reborn in lower forms of existence. He taught

[58] Lanfeng mentions that after Luo's death his wife kept the building (*an* 庵, "cloister") and lived there (*Zushi xingjiao shizi miao song*, p. 15). *An* usually refers to a small nunnery. According to Nayancheng's investigations, Luo had built near Simatai 司馬台 a hall for preaching (*JJCLFZZ*, Jiaqing 21/3/21 (1816), quoted in Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, p. 18).

[59] *Zangyi jingshu*, 10a.

[60] The text also speaks of the Nameless Eye (*wuming yan* 無名眼), which the *Kaixin fayao* edition (*j.* 2, 32) changes into Diamond Eye (*jin'gang yan* 金剛眼). The Nameless or Diamond Eye destroys demons while the Heavenly Eye opens the understanding of the Great *dao*.

[61] *Tan shi wuwei baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, pp. 445–447. The mantra of four sentences (*siju* 四句) is mentioned with an identical formulation on page 371.

[62] Cf. above p. 228.

[63] *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao*, *j.* 3, ch. 20, pp. 44–52.

that his teaching offered the only way to salvation, which meant that his disciples alone could escape an unfortunate rebirth. Accordingly, he severely reproaches apostates who had left his community. They will suffer boundless bitterness.[64] Even harsher is his condemnation of people who pretend to be his disciples and propagate wrong teachings to deceive people. "They will forever enter hell."[65]

This remark gives us some insight into the social position of Luo Menghong and his community. His fame was great enough to encourage other people to imitate his example and propagate similar teachings. Being a religious teacher with a large following was an attractive way of life that could bring fame and wealth. Like any successful entrepreneur, religious entrepreneurs easily face competition by others who copy them. And as with other crafts, the best way to acquire the skills of an eminent master is through apprenticeship. It is not uncommon that some disciples do not want to be apprentice forever but attempt to become master themselves. The founders of new religious movements usually were disciples of other teachers before they established their own teaching. Luo Menghong himself is an example, for he belonged for eight years to the sect of another master[66] and had tried other teachings before. Not surprisingly, some of his own disciples attempted to become teachers as well and to gain the benefits of such a position. Luo was well aware of these activities and sharply criticized them:

> There are also some people who belonged to the school of their master for five, ten, twenty or thirty years. When they were near to their master they were not attentive and neglected the law of the Buddha not worrying about the cycle of birth and death. Since they were not attentive [to my teaching] they cannot step on solid ground and their minds cannot attain an understanding of awakening to enlightenment. As they want good meals, they do not worry about the cycle of birth and death. As they want fame and profit, they propagate teachings outside [our school]. [...] People

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[64] Cf. *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao, j.* 1, ch. 1, pp. 47 f.

[65] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan*, ch. 22, in *BJCJ*, vol. 3, p. 281.

[66] That the teacher who taught him that Amitābha is the eternal father and mother (*wusheng fumu*) was not an ordinary Buddhist monk is clear from Mizang's remark: "One day he met a heretical teacher who taught him the secret formula of his school." (*Zangyi jingshu*, 10b). The secret formula probably was *Mituo fo wusheng fumu* 彌陀佛無生父母 (Amitābha Buddha, Eternal Father and Mother), cf. *Kugong wudao juan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, p. 110.

> of that kind recite these scriptures without understanding. Therefore they will enter hell.[67]

Here, fame and profit are specified as motives for leaving Luo's school and starting an independent career as a sect leader. It was probably Luo's own success that stimulated others to follow his example. Luo seems to have been very concerned about people who left his community, for he devotes a whole section of his scriptures to "The unspeakable bitterness lasting for many *kalpas* of those who abandon the *dao*."[68] In this section he also deals with disciples who have followed him for thirty, forty or even fifty years and then secretly abandoned the *dao,* preaching "wild idle talk" to others and thus causing the "disease of doubt." These self-styled teachers attempted to win their own following from the same social milieu as Luo. Even members of Luo's community could be attracted by such new religious leaders. Luo therefore admonishes his disciples not to follow them:

> You members of my community:[69] If you listen to the idle talk [of these people] it will cause the disease of doubt. [Only] earnestly listening to [the teaching of] my scriptures in five books will save you from the disease of doubt.[70]

Even during Luo Menghong's lifetime a process began that became a common tendency in the development of most new religious movements of the Ming and Qing dynasties: the splitting into different communities centred on individual leaders who usually claimed to transmit the teaching of the founding patriarch. It is such people whom Luo has in mind when he condemns teachers who pretend to be his disciples to attract followers and make use of his scriptures without real understanding. Since he admonishes his disciples not to follow such false teachers, we may assume that schismatic tendencies were a source of concern to him. However, Luo's fame widely surpassed that of his competitors and it does not seem that any of them could challenge his authority and influence. The sumptuous thirteen storey pagoda built near his tomb and the eulogies by men of high standing show that he remained unrivalled as leader of his movement until his death. And

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[67] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan*, ch. 25, in *BJCJ*, vol. 3, pp. 321–323.

[68] *Jieliang tui dao ku bu keshuo* 劫量退道苦不可説 (*Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan, j.* 1, ch. 1, p. 16).

[69] Literally: "male and female bodhisattvas of the ten directions".

[70] *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao, j.* 1, ch. 1, p. 36.

after his death he became the revered Patriarch Luo whose fame secured him a singular position among Chinese sect founders.

As long as Patriarch Luo was alive, his personality guaranteed the unity of his movement. While other teachers, who parted with Luo, may have established separate communities, they could not contest Luo's position as teacher and leader of his own movement. Yet things changed considerably after the founding patriarch had passed away. Luo does not seem to have chosen a successor as leader of his movement. There is a remarkable lack of information about its development during the decades following his death. Many later sectarian groups regarded Luo as their patriarch and it seems that Luo's community soon after his death split into different branches that all claimed to continue his tradition.[71] Since the unique authority of the founder did not exist any more, any disciple who was able to gather a following could declare to be carrying on Luo's teaching and thus establish his own branch of the movement. Thus, the movement founded by Luo Menghong became the starting point for a variety of different sectarian traditions.

2. The Unfolding of a Tradition

Little more than half a century after Luo Menghong's death, the activities of sectarian groups related to him raised the suspicion of officials. In the years after 1584 several memorials were presented to the throne warning against the influence of such groups as *Bailian jiao, Wuwei jiao* 無為教, and *Luo jiao*.[72] *Wuwei jiao* (Non-Action Teaching) probably[73]

[71] There are later traditions that Luo's sect split into eighteen branches after his death, of which five survived until the early nineteenth century. See below p. 400.

[72] *Ming shilu, Shenzong shilu, j.* 157, 3b-4a (Wanli 13/1 [1585]), *j.* 165, 4b-5a (Wanli 13/9 [1585]),*j.* 176, 7b (Wanli 14/7 [1586]) *j.* 182, 2b-3a (Wanli 15/1 [1587]).

[73] *Wuwei jiao* (Non-Action Teaching) is usually regarded as the name of Luo's sect. However, the term *wuwei* occurs in many sectarian contexts and is not confined to particular groups or scriptures. Although I do not doubt that in many cases *Wuwei jiao* refers to groups related to Luo's teaching, the name alone is not sufficient to be sure about that. In official documents there is an additional problem: Many officials do not seem to have been well informed about the sects they were writing about. Thus, the name *Bailian jiao* almost certainly was not an autonym of any sectarian group in the sixteenth century, i.e. a name by which the believers referred to their own community. Officials and historians used *Bailian jiao* as a generic term for religious groups considered heretical, and it thus says little about the particular tradition to which a group so called belonged (c.f. ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, chapter 1 *et passim*). Since in the memorials mentioned above *Wuwei jiao* is listed together with *Luo jiao* (or *Luo dao* 羅道),

and *Luo jiao* (Luo Teaching) certainly refer to religious groups deriving from Luo Menghong. At about the same time sects following Luo's teaching are mentioned by Buddhist critics, such as Mizang Daokai who notes that these sects are known by different names:[74] *Wuwei jiao*, *Dacheng jiao* 大乘教 (Great Vehicle Teaching) and *Wunian jiao* 無念教 (No-Reciting Teaching).[75] The sources show that at the end of the sixteenth century Luo sects had spread widely in north China and that they were known by various names. It remains obscure what the exact relationship between these sects was and how they grew out of Luo's original community. As we shall see, there were even more names used by sects that claimed to continue Patriarch Luo's teaching.

Transmission within the Luo family

Luo Menghong does not seem to have coined a name for his community, but he occasionally refers to his teaching as *Wuwei fa* 無為法 (Law of Non-Action)[76] and *Wuwei miaofa* 無為妙法 (Wonderful Law of Non-Action).[77] However, the expression is not very prominent in his writings and it may well be that it was not an established name but a casual designation. In any case, soon after his death many other names proliferate. The proliferation of sect names shows that there was no single community of his disciples but the movement split into different traditions and organizations. After the Patriarch had passed away there was no generally acknowledged leadership. Several of his disciples claimed to continue his tradition and became the leaders of independent sects sharing the common reverence for the Patriarch Luo and his writings. The most prominent positions among the leading members of his movement were probably occupied by Luo's relatives, his wife and the two children Fozheng 佛正 and Foguang 佛光. Lanfeng reports that the Venerable Grandmother, Luo's wife, continued the teaching

we may assume that the authors were not aware of different sectarian affiliations but simply quoted commonly known names.

[74] *Zangyi jingshu*, 11a.

[75] The meaning of *No-Reciting* is similar to *Non-Action* i.e., it refers to the rejection of ritual practices such as reciting *sūtras*. It is not known that *Wunian jiao* was used by any group as an autonym, and it seems therefore that it was used by outsiders to designate a group by its characteristic feature.

[76] Cf. *Poxie xianzheng baojing*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 2, pp. 113–115.

[77] *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao*, *j.* 4, ch. 19, pp. 65 f.

according to the former tradition. "She founded a branch of the Subtle and Wonderful Law which was called the *Yuandun Zhengjiao* 圓頓正教 (Orthodox Teaching of Complete and Sudden [Enlightenment])."[78] *Yuandun jiao* is the name of a well-known sect of the late Ming, which however did not claim to go back to Luo Menghong's wife.[79] Her two children followed her as sect leaders. Fozheng, the son, continued the male line of the Luo family. His grandson, Wenju 羅文舉 is mentioned in the imprint of the 1615 edition of the *Wubu liuce*, which was printed in Nanjing.[80] The patriarch of the fourth generation was Luo Congshan 羅從善.[81] He lived at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, official investigations brought to light that there were still male descendants of Luo's who were active as sect leaders. The centre of this family line was in Miyun, where Luo Menghong's tomb and the pagoda still existed. They were destroyed on official order in 1768 "to teach the people that one may not protect the grave of someone who has practised heterodox teachings."[82] After the ninth generation of the Patriarch's descendants this line of hereditary leadership came to an end. When in 1816 a further investigation was made

[78] *Zushi xingjiao shizi miao song*, in *Kugong wudao baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao, j.* 1, p. 16.

[79] The expression *yuandun* was common in the Buddhist tradition and does not necessarily refer to a particular sect. However, relationships existed between different sects and we cannot completely exclude that there were some connections between the *Yuandun zhengjiao* of Luo's wife and the later *Yuandun jiao*. The *Yuandun jiao* grew out of Wang Sen's 王森 *Dacheng jiao* 大乘教 (cf. Ma/Han, pp. 869–875; Wang Jianchuan 王見川, "Lüelun xiancun de er zhong «Jiulian jing» baojuan 略論現存二種《九蓮經》寶卷," in *Taiwan Zhaijiao de lishi guancha yu zhanwang* 台灣齋教的歷史觀察與展望, edited by Jiang Canteng and Wang Jianchuan, Taibei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1994, pp. 309–317: 313). Wang Sen in turn was possibly the son in-law of Luo Menghong's daughter Foguang (cf. Ma Xisha 馬西沙, "Taiwan Zhaijiao: Jintong jiao yuanyuan shishi bianzheng 台灣齋教：金幢教淵源史實辨證," in *Taiwan Zhaijiao de lishi guancha yu zhanwang* 台灣齋教的歷史觀察與展望, edited by Jiang Canteng and Wang Jianchuan, Taibei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1994, pp. 47–85: 62–67). Thus, the name *Yuandun jiao* may have been inspired by the example of Luo's wife. Incidentally, Lanfeng (same source as note 78) writes that she "opened the *Dacheng jing* 大乘經 in five books," and Wang Sen's sect adopted the name *Dacheng jiao*.

[80] Cf. Sawada Mizuho, *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū*, p. 311. A "young patriarch" (*shao zu* 少祖) with the personal name Wenju 文舉 is also mentioned in the *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 1, 29b. This probably refers to the same person who edited the 1615 edition of the *Wubu liuce*. It should be noted that the *Sanshi yinyou* belonged to a sectarian tradition that had a different line of succession and did not regard the descendants of Luo Menghong as their patriarchs.

[81] He is mentioned in *Bei Tanzhou Luo zu bujuan zhuisiji*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, pp. 49 f.

[82] *JJCLFZZ*, Qianlong 33/9/21 (1768), memorial by Yang Tingzhang, partly quoted in Ma/Han, p. 172 and Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, p. 19.

the only male member of the Luo family no longer practised the religion of his ancestors.[83]

In the eighteenth century, the Luo teaching was popular among the boatmen of the Grand Canal. They had congregation halls (*an* 庵) where monks occasionally also lived, but which were kept by lay people. A report of 1727 states that in Zhejiang there were originally 72 such halls, but only some thirty were left by that time. These halls had images of gods and buddhas just as common temples. They also functioned as hostels where the sailors could stay when they were out of work during the winter season.[84] At about the same time, a sailor and follower of Luo's teaching confessed that the leader of his sect was a descendant of Patriarch Luo in the eighth generation, whom he had, however, never met.[85] Thus, Luo Mingzhong, who was this eighth generation successor of Luo Menghong, was still considered head of the movement by communities whose members were mostly boatmen of the Grand Canal fleets. In 1768 the Governor-general of Fujian and Zhejiang reported of twenty-two congregation halls in Zhejiang where images and scriptures were found, among them Luo Menghong's writings. These scriptures were recited by those who could read, while the others simply burned incense as an act of worship. Although the memorial mentions Luo Mingzhong, who was long dead at that time, as direct descendant of the sect founder, it traces the origin of these congregations to three persons surnamed Qian 錢, Weng 翁, and Pan 潘. Qian and Weng stemmed from Miyun, the place were Patriarch Luo had been active. During the Ming dynasty the three came to Hangzhou, where they propagated the Luo Teaching and built a congregation hall each. Since these halls were near the rest places of the grain boats, many boatmen came to stay there and were converted to the teaching.[86]

Qian, Weng, and Pan had probably been boatmen themselves before they started their missionary work in Hangzhou. Each of them

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[83] The names of Luo's descendants active as sect leaders in the eighteenth century were Luo Mingzhong 羅明忠, Luo Guozhu 羅國柱 and Luo Delin 羅德林. For details cf. Ma/Han, pp. 251–256.

[84] Memorial by the Director-general of Grain Transport and Governor of Zhejiang Li Wei 李衛, Yongzheng 7 (1727), quoted in Ma/Han, pp. 258 f.

[85] *ZPZZ*, report of the Bureau of Punishments, probably Yongzheng 5/10, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 253.

[86] Memorial by Cui Yingjie 崔應階, Qianlong 33/11/30 (1768), in: *Shiliao xunkan*, no. 12, 407a -410b.

became the founder of a lineage that spread further when more congregation halls were built for the growing community of followers. Each hall was named after its founder but the leading position was not hereditary since the boatmen had no family and therefore no legal offspring. The congregations were not only religious communities but mutual-help associations that served the social needs of the boatmen. As most of them had no family to return to during the winter season, the halls provided accommodation to them and to the old and sick who could not work any more. The halls usually owned a piece of land, which secured some income and was also used as burial ground for deceased members.[87] Thus, these communities, which had grown out of Luo Menghong's religious movement, had acquired distinctive traits that differed considerably from Luo's original community. While the Patriarch's following included officials and other members of the educated classes, these boatmen represented the very lowest level of the social scale. They were attracted by a religious teaching that promised liberation from the world of suffering, which for them had a very concrete meaning. However, the communities not only traded in hope for salvation after death but offered very practical benefits to its members. They illustrate better than most other cases the wide range of social functions served by sectarian communities. To understand the proliferation of religious communities, these practical benefits are equally important as the appeal of their religious teachings.

Official investigations found that in the second half of the eighteenth century Luo's *Five Books in Six Volumes* were kept in the congregation halls together with pictures. Although these pictures probably included representations of Patriarch Luo, there were gods and buddhas like in other temples. Particularly mentioned are the Buddhas of the Three Epochs (*sanshi fo* 三世佛).[88] Since Luo's scriptures were used for ritual purposes, his teachings were apparently understood in a way that differed considerably from the Chan-Buddhist interpretations of earlier commentators such as Lanfeng. Reciting scriptures and burning incense were common religious practices, but hardly followed a teaching of non-action that rejected all conventional rituals. It is evident that the social background of the canal boatmen was completely different from that of the people who edited and commented Luo's scriptures in the seventeenth century. That their interpretations of his teachings also

[87] *Ibid.*

[88] *ZPZZ*, Yongzheng 6/1/29 (1728), memorial by Chen Shixia 陳時夏.

differed considerably is not surprising. However, these boatmen's congregations were clearly part of the Luo tradition. They revered the Patriarch and considered his descendants as masters. By the standards of sect lineage they belonged to a more "orthodox" line of the Luo movement than many other groups claiming to go back to the Patriarch Luo. Of course, it is misleading to speak of more or less "orthodox" versions of Luo's teaching. What we have is the unfolding of a tradition, which like any tradition was transformed in this process.

Besides the male line of Luo's descendants, which derived from his son Fozheng, there were other groups that traced their origin to his daughter Foguang. In 1816 a Wuwei cloister (*Wuwei an* 無衛庵), which had a picture of the Wuwei *jushi*[89] Lord Luo (無為居士羅公), was detected in the Pan mountain (Panshan 盤山) west of Peking. The cloister was kept by a nun named Xingkong 性空.

> Her teacher had told her that the Wuwei *jushi* Lord Luo was Patriarch Luo. This cloister was founded by Patriarch Luo's daughter who had the *dharma* name Foguang and became a nun in the Pan mountain. After her death the temple was maintained by Sun Shanren 孫善人. […] In the front hall buddhas were worshipped and in the rear hall the Patriarch Luo. On the first day of the fourth month each year there was an assembly when the people of the surrounding villages came and offered incense.[90]

This shows that in the early 19th century there was still a tradition that traced its origins to Patriarch Luo's daughter Foguang. Half a century earlier, when the boatmen congregations belonging to the Luo movement were investigated, the name Foguang had already appeared as founder of a branch of this movement. In 1768 the Governor of Jiangsu, Zhang Bao 張寶, reported about ten congregation halls (*jingtang* 經堂) in the Suzhou region, the oldest of which had been founded in 1701. About the origins of this tradition he found out:

> According to what they said, the beginning of their teaching was Luo Menghong 羅孟洪 of the Ming dynasty. Based on the principle of *qingjing wuwei* 清靜無為 (pure and still non-action) he founded a teaching and advised people to cultivate and profess it. Later generations called him Patriarch Luo. Luo Menghong's son Foguang and his son-in-law Wang

[89] *Jushi* is a common designation for lay Buddhists.

[90] *JJCLFZZ*, Jiaqing 21/2/29 (1816), memorial by Nayancheng, quoted in Ma Xisha, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, p. 18.

Shanren 王善人 transmitted another line, which was called *Dacheng jiao* 大乘教."[91]

Here Foguang is wrongly called the Patriarch's son instead of his daughter, which is probably the recorder's mistake. There is no doubt, however, that Foguang stood at the beginning of a line of transmission different from the male line of the Luo family. This is confirmed not only by the official investigations but also by internal documents of various sects, which also corroborate that Foguang was in some way related to two other persons surnamed Sun and Wang.[92] As Foguang was Luo's daughter, the leadership of the tradition based on her did not remain within the Luo family, which makes it difficult to trace its further development. As we shall see immediately, the splitting of Luo Menghong's movement into the lines of Fozheng and Foguang was just the overture to a development marked by continuous divisions and segmentation.

Transmission outside the Luo family

Among Luo Menghong's disciples was the Buddhist monk Daning 大甯, who had become a member of Luo's community on the day of Buddha Śākyamuni's birth in 1518.[93] The exact date given shows that entrance into Luo's community was a formal act of initiation. Daning left several scriptures to propagate the Luo teaching and sent his own disciples to Nancheng 南城 in Jiangxi as missionaries.[94] Since his writings are explicitly mentioned and criticized by the erudite monk Mizang Daokai, we may assume that they had gained a certain popularity by the end of the sixteenth century and the missionaries in Jiangxi had some success. Thus, the Luo Teaching spread to south China soon after the Patriarch's death.

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[91] Memorial by Zhang Bao, Qianlong 33/10/1 (1768), in *Shiliao xunkan*, no. 15, 526b.

[92] For discussion of these sources cf. Wang Jianchuan 王見川, "Jintong jiao san lun 金幢教三論," in *Taiwan de Zhaijiao yu luantang* 臺灣的齋教與鸞堂, Taibei: Nantian shuju, 1996, pp. 21–56: 29–35; Ma Xisha, "Taiwan Zhaijiao: Jintong jiao yuanyuan shishi bianzheng," pp. 62–67. Wang and Ma offer different interpretations of these sources, however the basic fact that Foguang founded a tradition independent of her brother Fozheng is not disputed.

[93] *Beijing zhongshi zan zuta zhi wen*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, pp. 252 f.

[94] *Zangyi jingshu*, 11b.

Daning's writings explain Luo's teaching without adding many new elements. He is eager to present it as orthodox Buddhism and even put it into the mouth of the Buddha:

> Ananda asked the Buddha: 'What is to be understood by the Unborn Parents (*Wusheng Fumu*)?' The World-honoured answered: 'Unborn, this means the source of all buddhas, the foundation of all things, the native place (*jiaxiang*) of all men. It is also the *dharma* body of the Limitless (*wuji*), which is called the ruler of the world.'[95]

While in Luo's writings the expression *Wusheng Fumu* (Unborn or Eternal Parents) is used rather critically, here it is a synonym for the Ultimate Reality or Limitless (*wuji*). It is also equated with Amitābha, which shows the influence of the Pure Land tradition. Daning understood Luo's teachings against the background of his own religious knowledge. We have here an example for a very common process in the development of new religious movements. Just as Daning interpreted Luo's teachings in the context of the more conventional Buddhist symbol system available to him, others used the same scriptures and understood them in the light of their knowledge. To the degree that the social and cultural background of those who turned to Luo's teachings were dissimilar, their interpretations focused on different aspects and gave them meanings that were in accord with the knowledge they already had. It is no surprise that followers who's understanding was shaped by traditional Buddhism presented the teaching in terms of Pure Land and Chan.

A different context for understanding Luo's teachings was the Confucian tradition. In the *Wuwei zhengzong liaoyi baojuan* 無為正宗了義寶卷 (*Precious Scroll on the Understanding of the Orthodox School of Non-Action*), which was written by Qin Dongshan 秦洞山 in the early sixteenth century, the author stresses traditional Confucian virtues such as filial piety, loyalty, and the five human relationships. While his understanding of the True Emptiness as the source of all is in accord with Luo's writings, he feels the need to warn against some misunderstandings of this teaching. Luo taught that basically all distinctions are futile, but according to Qin Dongshan this does not mean that social distinctions in the present world can be disregarded. Thus, the difference between the sexes must be respected and there cannot be unrestricted contact

[95] *Mingzong jiaoyi daben baojuan* 明宗教義達本寶卷, ch. 10, in *MJZJ*, vol. 6, p. 219a/b. Daning's authorship and connection with Patriarch Luo is stated in the preface (p. 201a).

between men and women within religious communities. Furthermore, the distinction between men and women also implies different obligations for husband and wife, father and son, as well as for lord and subject. Qin warns his co-religious not to mix the sexes and to have nocturnal meetings where heterodox teachings are discussed.[96] This does not seem to be a gratuitous warning but to refer to practices within some circles of Luo's followers.

Qin Dongshan was not a direct disciple of Luo but was introduced in his teaching by a Master Zhao (Zhao *gongshi* 趙公師). Zhao was a member of Patriarch Luo's community (*Luozu hui* 羅祖會) and introduced Qin into the Wuji sect (*Wuji dao* 無極道).[97] From this we can see that members of Patriarch Luo's community acted as teachers who adopted disciples of their own. As we have seen above, Luo in his writings sharply criticizes disciples who attracted their own following, and it seems that Master Zhao was one such case. He called his own sect *Wuji dao* (Way of the Limitless), which obviously refers to Luo's teachings, although Luo himself did not use this name. How this branch of the Luo movement was connected with the tradition headed by Luo's son we do not know. In a scripture of the early seventeenth century, Qin Dongshan is referred to as the second of a line of seven patriarchs ending with Mingkong 明空, the author of the scripture. All of these seven patriarchs are said to have left writings, some of which still exist.[98] Judging from the content of these scriptures, the teachings transmitted within this tradition underwent significant changes during the first century after Luo Menghong's death. The markedly Confucian flavour found in Qin Dongshan's *Wuwei zhengzong liaoyi baojuan* is replaced by an increasing influence of popular religious beliefs.

The fourth in this line of transmission was Sun Zhenkong 孫真空, to whom the *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan* 銷釋真空掃心寶卷 (*Precious Scroll on Zhenkong's Cleaning of the Mind*) is attributed. The scripture lays

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[96] Cf. *Wuwei zhengzong liaoyi baojuan, xia juan*, ch. 5, 15b, in *MJZJ*, vol. 4, p. 397b; on this scripture see Yu Songqing 喻松青, "«Wuwei zhengzong liaoyi baojuan» shang juan yanjiu《無為正宗了義寶卷》上卷研究," in *Minjian mimi zongjiao jingjuan yanjiu* 民間秘密宗教經卷研究, Taibei: Lianjing, 1994, pp. 187–204.

[97] *Wuwei zhengzong liaoyi baojuan*, ch. 24, 48a, in *MJZJ*, vol. 4, p. 414.

[98] *Foshuo sanhuang chufen tiandi tanshi baojuan* 佛說三皇初分天地嘆世寶卷, quoted by Sawada Mizuho, *Zōho hōkan no kenykyū*, pp. 330–332. The seven patriarchs are Li Xin'an 李心安, Qin Dongshan, Song Guzhou 宋孤舟, Sun Zhenkong 孫真空, Yu Kungang 于崑崗, Xu Xuankong 徐玄空 and Mingkong. For a discussion of their writings cf. Ma/Han, pp. 225–235.

strong emphasis on the belief in Amitābha and conventional Buddhist practices such as reciting the Buddha's name, vegetarianism, and moral behaviour. Zhenkong, which means "True Emptiness", is described as an illiterate woodcutter who lived in a monastery and knew only to recite the Buddha's name thousands of times every day.[99] His illiteracy may be a hagiographic stereotype used to aggrandize the breakthrough of his enlightenment, but it is probably true that he was an unordained monastery-dweller who practised *nianfo* (recalling the name of the Buddha). This biographic background explains why his interpretation stresses religious practices that are considered dispensable in Luo Menghong's writings. He encourages conventional Buddhist practices because they were familiar to him, but he describes their purpose in a language that betrays the influence of popular religious traditions: Religious progress will lead the believers to return to the original home of the Eternal Parents (*Wusheng Fumu*) who weep because their children have lost their true nature and suffer in this world:

> I urge you all to recall the name of the Buddha (*nianfo*) and to make progress in self-cultivation. For the Eternal Mother (*Wusheng Mu* 無生母) and the Dragon-Flower Assembly (*Longhua hui* 龍華會) are waiting for the children since a long time.[100]

Sun Zhenkong's reference to the Eternal Mother and the Dragon-Flower Assembly show that half a century after Patriarch's Luo death[101] this branch of his movement had already adopted the symbols of other sectarian traditions. Unlike Patriarch Luo, Sun Zhenkong regards recalling the name of Amitābha as the most essential religious practice:

> The Mother says, you do not need many words and sayings. One single sentence of Mituo (Amitābha) that you remember in your bosom [will be

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[99] *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan* 銷釋真空掃心寶卷, in *BJCJ*, vol. 18, pp. 400–404, 555–557. For Sun Zhenkong's biography and his scripture cf. Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, pp. 313–315.

[100] *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan*, *j.* 1, in *BJCJ*, vol. 18, p. 522.

[101] The existing edition of the *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan* is dated Wanli 23 (1595), but in the text there is a reference to another printing in 1584 (cf. Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, p. 313), which is the *terminus ante quem* of Sun Zhenkongs activities.—If, however, Sun Zhenkong as founder of the *Nanwu jiao* (see below) is the same as the *Nanwu zu* 南無祖 (Nanwu Patriarch) mentioned in the *Jiulian jing* (*BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 269), he would have been a younger contemporary of Patriarch Luo since the *Jiulian jing* was printed in 1523. This would imply that the sectarian tradition which lists Sun Zhenkong as fourth patriarch of the *Wuwei*-Teaching split off from Luo's community already during his lifetime.

enough]. If you always recall (*nian* 念) the [name of the] buddha you will reach the Western Heaven, the Heaven of the Pure Land.[102]

The *nianfo* taught by Sun Zhenkong is different from the common practice of reciting the buddha's name. It must be done "without moving the mouth or the tongue."[103] In Sun Zhenkong's teaching conventional Buddhist practice and ideas are merged with esoteric elements of sectarian traditions. He repeatedly stresses the importance of an enlightened teacher who must transmit the way to salvation, and he refers to the initiation ritual of opening the Mysterious Pass (*xuanguan*).[104] Although Sun Zhenkong is described as a "poor monk," his following was by no means confined to the lower scales of society. The fine printing and beautiful binding of his scripture[105] show that his community included wealthy and educated people.

The influence of popular religious beliefs on the Luo movement is even more apparent in the writings of Mingkong, the seventh patriarch of this line of transmission. Mingkong, which means "Bright Emptiness", lived in the early seventeenth century, less than hundred years after Patriarch Luo. His profane name was Chen Zhongzhi 陳仲智. He lost his mother at an early age and had practised vegetarianism since his youth, which means he probably belonged to a lay Buddhist or sectarian milieu. In 1611 he moved to Shixia not far from Miyun, where Patriarch Luo had lived and which was a centre of his movement.[106] Since in Mingkong's community the *Wubu liuce* were transmitted,[107] it evidently belonged to the Luo tradition.[108] Still, in Mingkong's scriptures, belief in the Eternal Mother (*Wusheng Laomu* 無生老母) has a very prominent

[102] *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan, j.* 2, in *BJCJ*, vol. 19, p. 24.

[103] *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan, j.* 1, in *BJCJ*, vol. 18, pp. 436, 439.

[104] *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan, j.* 1, in *BJCJ*, vol. 18, p. 414.

[105] Cf. Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, p. 314.

[106] *Foshuo dazang xianxing liaoyi baojuan* 佛説大藏顯性了義寶卷, *j.* 1, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 232.

[107] Cf. *Foshuo xiaoshi bao'an baojuan* 佛説銷釋保安寶卷, in *BJCJ*, vol. 6, p. 38. This scripture was written in the late Ming or early Qing (p. 249) by Miaokong 妙空, who was successor of Mingkong. It is discussed by Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, pp. 355–357. Overmyer classifies it as a book for which the exact sectarian affiliation is not clear. However, as Patriarch Luo's scriptures were transmitted, there cannot be any doubt that its author regarded himself as belonging to Luo's *Wuwei* tradition. There are several references to it and the opening *gāthā* starts with the sentence "The wonderful law of non-action (*wuwei miaofa* 無為妙法), only a few people know it and most people will rarely meet it." (*BJCJ*, vol. 6, p. 16).

[108] The teaching is also called *Dacheng guangming Wuwei dadao* 大乘光明無為大道

place. His experience of enlightenment is described as a direct encounter with the Mother who had taken the human form a poor woman.[109] The Mother urged him to write several scriptures, which she personally checked and which thus contain her true teachings. Here the symbol of the Unborn Parents, which in Luo's writings is used in a rather abstract way, has been fully transformed into the popular image of the Unborn Mother who is described as a personal deity full of compassion for her lost children. Moreover, Mingkong combined the belief in the Unborn Mother with other popular traditions not found in Patriarch Luo's writings. He explicitly refers to the buddhas of the three cosmic times ruling the past, the present, and the future, which are called the periods of *qingyang* 青陽 (Green Yang), *hongyang* 紅陽 (Red Yang) and *baiyang* 白陽 (White Yang).[110] Thus, within a century after Luo Menghong's death his followers had adopted the full range of popular religious beliefs including the expectation of a new time ruled by Maitreya.[111] The sect still used the name already mentioned in Luo's writings: *Wuwei jiao* (Non-Action Teaching)[112] but was also called *Wuwei famen baiyang zhengzong* 無為法門白陽正宗, which can be translated as *Orthodox Line of the Non-Action School in the Baiyang Period*.[113] The Luo Teaching had developed into a sectarian movement that shared the basic beliefs with the Maitreyist tradition so sharply criticized in the writings of the Patriarch.

I have sketched this development to show the difficulties of identifying some sectarian groups as belonging to the Luo tradition. Even within the same line of transmission there were considerable differences in the understanding of Luo's teachings. It took less than a century to transform the Confucian interpretation offered by Qin Dongshan into

(Great Way of Non-Action Illuminated by the Great Vehicle). *Foshuo xiaoshi bao'an baojuan,* in *BJCJ,* vol. 6, p. 36.

[109] Ma/Han, pp. 233 f, referring to the *Foshuo dazong xianxing liaoyi baojuan.* A similar story is contained in the *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan, j.* 2 (*BJCJ,* vol. 18, pp. 87–114) where Sun Zhenkong's encounter with a poor woman and her two children is described. The woman is obviously a transformed form of *Wusheng Laomu.* One passage reads: "If you ask for my humble name, I am the old mother of the Numinous Mountain. People who see me in the form of a poor woman will take part in the Third Dragon-Flower Assembly" (p. 109).

[110] For an analysis of Mingkong's writings and quotations of the *Foshuo dazhang xianxing baojuan* cf. Ma/Han, pp. 232–235.

[111] *Foshuo xiaoshi bao'an baojuan,* in *BJCJ,* vol. 6, p. 59.

[112] The text has *Wuwei fa* 無為法 (*BJCJ,* vol. 6, p. 365).

[113] *Foshuo xiaoshi bao'an baojuan,* in *BJCJ,* vol. 6, p. 73.

a tradition where the Unborn Mother and Maitreya had a central place. Although the names *Wuwei jiao* and *Dacheng jiao* without any doubt can be traced back to a very early phase of the Luo tradition, they say nothing about the understanding of Luo's teaching and the beliefs upheld within sects so designated. Nor does the transmission of Luo's *Five Books in Six Volumes* allow to conclude that its teachings were strictly followed. What we also observe is an abundance of sect names and of slightly changed or enlarged names of older sects. Even in one and the same scripture the same sect may be referred to by different designations. It is virtually impossible to say what the name of the Luo movement was, for there was no single Luo sect with an exclusive name. There was no such thing as the "orthodox" line of a sectarian tradition, even if many groups claimed to represent an "orthodox" lineage (*zhengzong* 正宗 or *zhengpai* 正派). Of course, we can hardly expect them to call themselves heterodox or insignificant.

In view of the general tendency of sect movements to split, we may ask if the account of seven patriarchs who succeeded Luo down to Mingkong is to be taken at face value. It is certainly not to be understood as a succession of patriarchs who conferred the leadership of their community to one after the other.[114] To include someone in the line of patriarchs does not mean that the next patriarch inherited the former's position as sect leader but rather that he belonged to the community of the former one. The traditions descending from Sun Zhenkong, the fourth in this line of patriarchs, may serve as an example. We know that Patriarch Sun called his teaching *Nanwu dadao* 南無大道 (Great Way of the Namo) or *Nanwu jiao* 南無教,[115] which refers to his favourite practice of recalling the name of the Buddha Amitābha. In the *Longhua jing* 龍華經, which was finished in the first years of the Qing dynasty, Patriarch Sun is listed as the founder of the *Nanwu jiao*, which shows that his teaching was continued under the same name after his death.[116] However, this *Nanwu jiao*, which regarded Patriarch Sun as its founder,

[114] The first of this line is Li Xin'an and the second Qin Dongshan. However, Qin Dongshan's teacher was not Li Xi'nan but Master Zhao. Thus, there was no direct line of transmission between the first and the second "patriarch". This has been observed by Wang Jianchuan 王見川, "Longhua jiao yuanliu tansuo 龍華教源流探索," in *Taiwan de Zhaijiao yu luantang* 臺灣的齋教與鸞堂, Taibei: Nantian shuju, 1996, pp. 2–19: 8 f.

[115] *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan, j.* 1, in *BJCJ,* vol. 18, pp. 401, 413, 420.

[116] Cf. *Gufo Tianzhen kaozheng Longhua baojing* 古佛天真考證龍華寶經, ch. 23, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 736b. Thereafter referred to as *Longhua jing.*

was another tradition than the one leading to Mingkong and his successor Miaokong 妙空. For the latter, Sun was not the founder but the fourth patriarch. Since Sun was listed in at least two different lines of succession,[117] some of his later followers must have founded independent communities that shared the common reverence for Sun Zhenkong as patriarch.[118] Just as the community headed by Patriarch Sun developed into different sectarian traditions, any congregation was prone to split. Sectarian leadership depended solely on the ability to attract a sufficient number of followers and there were no means to prevent a member of a community to become the leader of a new group. Thus, within only a few generations a sectarian tradition could branch off into an ever increasing number of sectarian communities that all had the same origin. In some cases they may have continued to regard themselves as belonging to the same tradition, as did the various communities of boatmen that in the eighteenth century still revered the descendants of the Luo family as their head. In other cases they neglected the historical precursors and started a new lineage, such as the followers of the *Nanwu jiao* who considered Patriarch Sun the founder of their tradition. Of course, the whole Luo movement was such a case since Luo Menghong was regarded as the founder of a new tradition neglecting that he

[117] According to the tradition of the *Jintong pai* 金幢派 (Golden Pennant Sect) in Taiwan, the founder of this sect, Wang Zuotang 王左搪, followed a teacher called Patriarch Sun (Sun zushi 孫祖師) after he had left the family of Patriarch Luo. Sun later transmitted the leadership of his sect to Wang Zuotang (*Taiwan sheng tongzhi, Renmin zhi, Zongjiao pian* 臺灣省通志人民志宗教篇, Taibei 1977, 81a). This implies that there are probably more than two sect traditions claiming descent from Patriarch Sun.—For different views about the identity of Wang Zuotang and its relation to Wang Sen cf. Hubert Seiwert, "Popular religious sects in south-east China: Sect connections and the problem of the Luo Jiao/Bailian Jiao dichotomy," *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 20 (1992), pp. 33–60: 48–51: Wang Jianchuan, "Jintong jiao san lun," and Ma Xisha, "Taiwan Zhaijiao: Jintong jiao yuanyuan shishi bianzheng."

[118] The line of Mingkong probably separated from Sun's *Nanwu jiao* in the generation after Sun. According to Mingkong's *Foshuo sanhuang chufen tiandi tanshi baojuan* the patriarch preceding Sun was Song Guzhou 宋孤舟 and his successors as fifth patriarch was Yu Kungang 于崑崗. Both are mentioned in the *Xiaoshi Zhenkong saoxin baojuan* (*BJCJ*, vol. 19, p. 21), which confirms that Yu Kungang had a prominent position in Sun's community. He probably continued the *Nanwu jiao* founded by Patriarch Sun. However, in the *Foshuo xiaoshi bao'an baojuan*, which was written by Mingkong's successor Miaokong, Sun does not appear any more. It simply speaks of a tradition of nine patriarchs, of whom only Siwei 四維 (i.e., "Luo" split into two characters), Xuankong and Mingkong are mentioned by name (*BJCJ*, vol. 6, p. 365). It was probably Xuankong who separated from the *Nanwu jiao* led by Yu Kungang to form his own community. It should be noted that his successors all had *kong* 空 as part of their religious names.

belonged to the community of another master before he established himself as teacher.[119]

Within less than a hundred years after Patriarch Luo, his movement had developed into many different communities whose relation to each other is often obscure. It is impossible to select any of them as the "orthodox" form of the Luo Teaching because there was no generally recognized standards or institutions on which the claim to orthodoxy could be based. Thus, the transmission from Patriarch Luo to Mingkong and further to Miaokong, which called itself *Wuwei jiao*, was just one of many others that all looked back to Patriarch Luo as their founder. One of these others was a sect movement led by a certain Hou Biao 侯表 flourishing during the Wanli era (1573–1619) in southwestern Shandong and the neighbouring areas:

> Hou Biao was a man from Yutai 魚台 who for a long time with people from Jinxiang 金鄉, Juye 巨野, and Nanpi 南皮 had gathered a following of many thousands. [In this community] they recited the *Five Books and Six Scriptures* (*wubu liujing* 五部六經) of the Luo sect (*Luo dao* 羅道). Thereafter, his community was divided into three thousand congregations (*she* 社). Each congregation had a congregation head (*shezhang* 社長) and a congregation promoter (? *sheju* 社舉). [The members of] the congregations contributed one *fen* 分 of money that was sent to the congregation head. When there was a mishap in any congregation that could not be handled, they [helped] with the congregation money. Countless people relied on the teachings of the Luo sect because of such benefits, and they even more venerated [Hou] Biao, almost like a god. [...] At that time the Defender-general of the State (*zhenguo jiangjun* 鎮國將軍)[120] in Lu 魯 prefecture also was ritually accepted as disciple and in Dongxiang 東鄉 paid reverence to [Hou] Biao as teacher.[121]

[119] It could be argued that Patriarch Luo *really* founded a new tradition since he left his influential writings. However, all patriarchs listed in the *Foshuo sanhuang chufen tiandi tanshi baojuan* likewise left writings. We also cannot say that Luo's scriptures were more original than later writings. Luo was influenced by Chan and Pure Land traditions to a degree that some scholars tend to regard his teachings as a variation of Buddhism. On the other hand, the writings of Sun Zhenkong and Mingkong are not just elaborations of Luo's teachings but add significant new elements.

[120] Third highest of 8 titles granted to male descendants of emperors; granted to younger sons of Commandery Princes (Charles O. Hucker, *A dictionary of official titles in Imperial China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985, no. 382).

[121] Ju Jiusi 瞿九思, *Wanli wugong lu* 萬歷武功錄, vol. 1 (quoted in Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, p. 19).

This account shows that there were well organized communities with networks of thousands of congregations in southern Shandong at the end of the sixteenth century. Even if the numbers given are probably exaggerated, Hou Biao must have been the leader of an impressive movement. Since Patriarch Luo's scriptures were recited in these communities, we can take them as belonging to the Luo tradition. People were not only attracted by the teachings but also by the material support provided by the congregations. We have met a similar pattern in the congregations of boatmen that acted as mutual-help associations a century later further south.

It should be noted that Hou Biao's followers included both peasants and members of the highest nobility. Unfortunately we have not more information about his community. Hou Biao, who was venerated by his followers "almost like a god," does not appear to have been subordinated to any other sectarian leader, and his community was apparently independent of the Luo sects in the Peking region. The numerous congregations into which his movement was divided seem to have developed separately after Hou Biao's death. Nothing is known about their later history but the Luo tradition remained strong in sectarian milieus of the Shandong area.

Indirect lines of transmission

Although sect networks often extended over several provinces, geographical distance furthered the formation of independent sect organizations. Hou Biao's community in Shandong was such a case. At about the same time, in 1585, a community of the *Wuwei jiao*, which was involved in an attempted rebellion, was found as far south as Guangdong province.[122] As early as the early sixteenth century the Luo Teaching had spread to the South. As has been mentioned above, Luo's disciple Daning had sent missionaries to Jiangxi. In the following decades the Luo Teaching was propagated also in Zhejiang, to where it may have been brought by boatmen and soldiers of the Grand Canal.

[122] *Ming shilu*, *Shenzong shilu*, *j.* 165, 4b-5a (Wanli 13/9 [1585[) : "In Guangdong, Chengxiang 程鄉 county the sorcerer Liu Qingshan 劉青山 founded a *Wuwei jiao* community and gathered a band to start a rebellion. The official troupes attacked him, killing and capturing more than seventy people. The chief culprit escaped." Since there is no more information about this *Wuwei jiao*, it is not certain that it was related to the Luo Teaching.

Zhejiang, Fujian, and Jiangxi became the centre of an important branch of the Luo tradition, which in the eighteenth century was known as *Laoguan zhaijiao* 老官齋教 (Vegetarian Teaching of the Venerable Officials) or simply *Zhaijiao* 齋教 (Vegetarian Teaching). The *Laoguan zhaijiao* first appeared in official documents in 1748, when in the first month members of the sect started a revolt to free a leader who had been imprisoned two months before. The rebellion, which broke out in Jianning 建寧 prefecture in northern Fujian province, was quickly suppressed by local militia and government troops. The ensuing investigation brought to light a scripture, the *Sanshi yinyou* 三世因由 (*Vitae [of the Patriarchs] in Three Generations*), that identified Patriarch Luo as the first patriarch of the sect. From this, and from the evidence of captured sect members, it was concluded that *Laoguan zhaijiao* was another name for *Luo jiao* or *Dacheng jiao* 大乘教 (Great Vehicle Teaching).[123]

According to the confessions of sect members the sect originally belonged to the *Luo jiao.* It had already been investigated and harassed by local officials almost twenty years before in 1729 and thereafter changed its name into *Yizi jiao* 一字教 (Single-Character Teaching)[124] to avoid further persecution. They were also called *Laoguan zhai* 老官齋 (Venerable Official Vegetarians).[125] The early history of this sect, as it is presented in the *Sanshi yinyou* sheds some light on the formation and transmission of sect organizations. It is described as a succession of the three patriarchs Luo, Yin 殷, and Yao 姚. However, this line of succession was only indirect. The second in this line, Yin Ji'nan 殷繼南 (1527–1582),[126] was born in the year of Patriarch Luo's death and

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[123] Some important documents related to this attempted rebellion are published in *Shiliao xunkan,* no. 27 and 29. A more detailed account can be obtained from additional documents now in the First Historical Archives in Peking. The rebellion is described by Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist religion,* pp. 121–123.

[124] The name "one single character" may refer to the custom of having *pu* 普 as the first character of the *dharma*-name of its members. It may, however, also be a reference to the teaching of Patriarch Luo that from the one single character *mu* 母 (Mother) all things originate (*Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao, j.* 1, ch. 4, p. 88.)

[125] *ZPZZ,* Qianlong 23/11/24, memorial by Kai Tai 開泰, quoted in Ma Xisha 馬西沙, "Jiangnan Zhaijiao yanjiu 江南齋教研究," in *Qingshi yanjiu ji* 清史研究集, vol. 7, 1990, pp. 201–24: 213.

[126] The *Sanshi yinyou* gives 1540 as the year of his birth (*j.* 2, 54a) which is improbable because the same source (9a/b) states that he became the apprentice of a silver smith in 1544. According to official investigations he was born in 1527 (*JJCLFZZ,*

thus was not his direct disciple. Equally, the third patriarch Yao Wenyu 姚文宇 (1578–1646)[127] was born too late to be a disciple of the second patriarch. Thus, the *Laoguan zhaijiao* did not derive directly from the sect organization founded by Luo Menghong, although it regarded him as first patriarch and transmitted his *Wubu liuce*. After the Luo Teaching was disseminated to south China in the early sixteenth century it became the nucleus for the formation of new sectarian traditions.

Yin Ji'nan was a man from Chuzhou 處州 prefecture, which is situated in the southwestern part of Zhejiang province. He early lost his parents and was sent by his uncle to the Jinshasi 金沙寺 monastery where he stayed for some years. After he had left the monastery he was initiated into a vegetarian sect by Ding Yu 丁于, a silver smith whose apprentice he was. In 1544, when he was seventeen years old, he met a certain Lu Benshi[128] 盧本師 who was a follower of the Luo Teaching and probably the leader of a congregation in Chuzhou. Because Yin Ji'nan showed a complete understanding of the *Wuwei* teaching, Lu Benshi recognized him as a reincarnation of Patriarch Luo. Yin Ji'nan was revered as reborn patriarch and became the leader of the local congregation of Luo followers.[129] He was an able organizer who gained a large following in central and eastern Zhejiang. His sect, which was called *Wuwei zhengjiao* 無為正教 (Orthodox Teaching of Non-Action),[130] was organized hierarchically. The top officials were twenty-eight officials called *huashi* 化師 (conversion master) and seventy-two *yinjin* 引進 (introducer). The *huashi* were the leaders of local congregations and are listed individually in the *Sanshi yinyou*.[131] This well organized sect and the great number of its members arose the suspicion of local officials. In 1576 Yin Ji'nan was imprisoned in Tiantai 天台

Qianlong 40/2/21 (1775), memorial by Sanbao 三寶, quoted in Ma Xisha, "Jiangnan Zhaijiao yanjiu," p. 204).

[127] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 1a/b.

[128] *Benshi*, meaning "original master (or teacher)", in Buddhist contexts is a title for buddha Śākyamuni. It here probably also is a honorary title rather than a personal name. Lu Benshi would thus mean "Lu the Original Master", which possibly indicates that Lu was the first master of the Luo Teaching in the area of Chuzhou or that he was considered a reincarnation of buddha Śākyamuni.

[129] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 9a-12a.

[130] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 26a.

[131] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 40b-41a.

and released only after six years to return to his native place. However, shortly afterwards he was arrested again and executed in 1582.[132]

Yin Ji'nan became the leader of a sect that already existed and which apparently was an offshoot of the Luo Teaching. The geographical distance allowed him to organize his own sect independently of the branches that were nearer to the centre of this movement in north China. A new feature introduced by Yin was a hierarchy of sect officials.[133] He also introduced the custom of giving members of his sect religious names with *pu* as the first character. However, his innovations modified not only the formal organization but affected also the religious teachings of the sect. Although Yin Ji'nan legitimized his position as leader claiming to be a reincarnation of Patriarch Luo, and the *Five Books in Six Volumes* continued to be esteemed and transmitted, he added new elements that were not contained in Luo's writings and in some way contradicted them. The most conspicuous innovation was the teaching about *Wusheng Laomu*, the Unborn Venerable Mother, as the creator of all beings and the sequence of three cosmic periods ruled by the three Buddhas Dīpaṃkara (Randeng fo 燃燈佛), Śākyamuni, and Maitreya.[134] To the three periods correspond three teachings called *shangcheng* 上乘, *zhongcheng* 中乘, and *sancheng* 三乘 (Former, Middle, and Third Vehicle).[135] The method taught by Yin Ji'nan was viewed as representing the teaching of the Third Vehicle, or the last stage.[136] Since this last stage is ruled by the Buddha Maitreya, Yin's teaching comes very near to the Maitreya Teaching, which is severely criticized in Patriarch Luo's writings. Apparently, Yin's use of the *Five Books in Six Volumes* was selective and did not prevent him from adding elements that were not in accord with them. Another element that

[132] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 38a-44b.

[133] It cannot be excluded that the titles for sect officers were already known in Lu Benshi's community. Ding Yu, who initiated Yin, is once called Ding *huashi* (*Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 9a), which may, however, be a retrospective designation.

[134] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 29a-30b. The names given to the three cosmic periods differ from the ones used in other sects: *huangyang jie* 黃楊劫 (Yellow Willow *Kalpa*), *hongchen jie* 紅塵劫 (Red Dust *Kalpa*) and *baiyang jie* 白陽劫 (White Sun *Kalpa*).

[135] The standard pronunciation of the character 乘 meaning "vehicle" is *sheng*, as in the expression *dasheng* 大乘 (Mahāyāna, Great Vehicle). However, in sectarian contexts or popular usage 大乘 seems to have been pronounced *dacheng*, since it is occasionally also written 大成. I have therefore decided to romanize always *cheng*.

[136] In the preface to the *Kugong wudao baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao* (*j.* 1, *shou* 首, p. 8) Yin Ji'nan (whose name here is given as Ying 應 Ji'nan) is said to have left the method of the Teaching of the Third Vehicle (*sancheng jiao fa* 三乘教法).

appears to depart from Luo's teachings is the importance of esoteric practices as the opening of the Mysterious Pass (*xuanguan*) and the transmission of secret mantras.[137] Yin Ji'nan interprets Luo's writings in a way that shows the influence of Daoist *neidan* 內丹 (internal alchemy) practices.[138] We have seen, however, that the *Wubu liuce* is not completely free from such elements even if they are not stressed there.

It is tempting to speculate about the origins of these new elements in Yin Ji'nan's sect. Possibly, Yin was influenced by other sectarian traditions before he became the leader of Lu Benshi's *Luo jiao* community. There is a remark in the preface to Patriarch Yin's biography that he continued the tradition of the *Hunyuan pai* 混元派 (Branch of the Chaos Origin).[139] *Hunyuan* is an alternative name for the *Hongyang* jiao* 弘陽教 (Vast Yang Teaching) which was founded by Piaogao 飄高 in 1594.[140] Since Yin Ji'nan died in 1582, he cannot have been influenced by Piaogao's teaching. However, a *Hunyuan* sect (*Hunyuan men* 混元門) led by a Master Wang 王 existed even before Piaogao in Henan[141] where Piaogao joined it. This tradition claimed to go back to the Hongwu era (1368–1398)[142] and may thus have influenced the development of Yin Ji'nan's sect. In any case, some of his teachings not found in Patriarch Luo's writings appear in the *Hunyuan* tradition. These include the idea of three cosmic periods and a scenario of salvation where Śākyamuni and countless deities are sent down by *Hunyuan Laozu* 混元老祖 (Venerable Patriarch Chaos Origin) and the Unborn Venerable Mother to rescue mankind from the world of suffering. Among the heavenly saviours who are successively reborn as humans is also Patriarch Luo.[143]

A similar teaching of successive incarnations of divine saviours appears in Yin Ji'nan's sect. Lu Benshi identified Yin as a new incarnation of Patriarch Luo. It may be that Lu Benshi's community was already influenced by the *Hunyuan* tradition that combined Patriarch Luo's

[137] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 13b, 31a/b, 35a.

[138] Cf. Wang Jianchuan, "Longhua jiao yuanliu tansuo," pp. 13 f.

[139] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 1b-2a.

[140] For the *Hongyang* jiao* see below pp. 318 ff.

[141] *Hongyang kugong wudao jing* 弘陽苦功悟道經, ch. 10, in *BJCJ*, vol. 15, p. 239.

[142] *Hongyang wudao mingxin* 弘陽悟道明心, introduction, in *BJCJ*, vol. 16, p. 19.

[143] *Hunyuan Hongyang linfan Piaogao jing* 混元弘陽臨凡飄高經, *j.* 2, ch. 24, in *BJCJ*, vol. 17, p. 151. This scripture was not written before the last decade of the sixteenth century. We do not know, therefore, whether Patriarch Luo was also included into the line of heavenly sent messengers in the earlier *Hunyuan* tradition.

teaching with the belief in Maitreya and *Wusheng Laomu*. Yin Ji'nan was too young when he entered Lu Benshi's community to have before been influenced by many other religious traditions;[144] he apparently continued the *Hunyuan* teachings of Lu Benshi.[145] Thus, his sect did not transmit the "pure" Luo Teaching but was a blend of at least two traditions. This shows how precarious it is to identify a given sectarian community with a specific tradition. Observers, whether Chinese officials or modern scholars, are inclined to reduce the diversity of sectarian groups by identifying them with a limited number of known traditions. This certainly cannot be avoided, but it engenders the risk of overlooking the dynamics and complexity of sectarian developments. Sectarian lineages are an important means to reconstruct historical connections but they give little information about the actual teachings and organization of a given community. If anything was constant in the development of sectarian traditions then it was the dynamics of change.

This becomes clear when we turn to the further development of Yin Ji'nan's sect. Yao Wenyu (1578–1646), who is described in the *Sanshi yinyou* as third patriarch following Yin Ji'nan, was only four years old when Yin died and thus did not immediately succeed him. After Patriarch Yin had been executed in 1582, one of the twenty-eight *huashi* (conversion masters), a woman with the *dharma* name Pufu 菩福, became leader of the sect in Zhejiang.[146] Chen Zizhong 陳子忠, another *huashi* with the *dharma* name Puji 菩記 brought the sect to Anhui where it was continued under the name *Wuji zhengpai* 無極正派 (Orthodox Branch of the Limitless). To this branch belonged Pushen 菩伸 who in 1652 published the *Kaixin fayao* edition of the *Wubu liuce*. Still another branch was known as *Yingzu jiao* 應祖教 (Teaching of Patriarch Ying) and brought to Fujian in late Ming times.[147] Yao Wenyu, the third patriarch of the *Laoguan zhaijiao*, did not begin his sectarian career as a member of any of these communities. A man from Chuzhou,

[144] He was probably influenced by Buddhist teachings during his years in the Jinshasi monastery.

[145] This is explicitly stated in the preface to his biography in the *Sanshi yinyou*, as noted above. Furthermore, as Wang Jianchuan has observed ("Longhua jiao yuanliu tansuo," p. 14), the preface to the *Keyi baojuan* 科儀寶卷, which belongs to the *Zhaijiao* tradition, mentions *Hunyuan Laozu* 混元老祖 as the deity that manifested itself to transmit the True Teaching (cf. *MJZJ*, vol. 6, p. 393a).

[146] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 46a.

[147] Wang Jianchuan, "Longhua jiao yuanliu tansuo," p. 14. Patriarch Ying is the same person as Patriarch Yin.

he met in his youth a teacher who converted him to an unspecified sect (*daomen* 道門). Since the teacher gave him the *dharma* name *Pushan* 菩善, we may conclude that his sect was in some way related to Yin Ji'nan's. In 1613 Yao Wenyu visited Yin's grave in Chuzhou. Thereafter he tried without much success to gain his own following until in 1621 he met two leading members of Yin Ji'nan's sect. Puli 菩理 and his sister Pubo 菩波 both had the sect rank of *huashi*. They accepted Yao Wenyu as their teacher. He became the leader of a community that had its centre in Pubo's home and within some years grew to almost four thousand members. His success was possible because he drew many members of Yin Ji'nan's sect to his new community. Pufu, who was the head of the branch in Zhejiang, finally recognized Yao as master and transferred the leadership to him. Yao legitimized his claim to leadership by declaring himself a reincarnation of the second patriarch Yin Ji'nan.[148]

Yao Wenyu's position as leader of the sect founded by Yin Ji'nan was not unrivalled. He had to defend his claim against other leading members of this tradition. Competition existed also with the leaders of other sects. One such rival was a teacher surnamed Chen 陳 who practised the *Wutong fa* 五通法 (Method of the Five Supernatural Abilities). This "heterodox teacher" (*xie shi* 邪師) lured away members of Yao's community.[149] Conflicts and rivalries with other teachers were a frequent concern to Yao Wenyu. The greatest threat were schismatic tendencies within his own community. He bitterly remarks that "devils from outside can be repelled, while it is difficult to protect against devils from inside. The seventy-two heterodox schools (*xie men* 邪門) emerge from one single school. One must be extremely watchful in every case."[150] One such case was Wang Changsheng 汪長生, a high-ranking member of Yao's community who founded his own sect and draw many followers with him.[151] Wang Changsheng became an important sect leader and was later regarded as the tenth patriarch of one branch of the *Huangtian jiao* 黃天教 (Yellow Heaven Teaching).[152] Another schism occurred after Yao Wenyu had married in 1626. This

[148] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 1a-4b, 27a-31b. For Yao Wenyu's biography see also Ma/Han, pp. 349–353; Wang Jianchuan, "Longhua jiao yuanliu tansuo," pp. 15–17.

[149] *Sanshi yinyou,* 7a/b. See also 24b for a similar case in Guangdong.

[150] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 8a.

[151] *Sanshi yinyou, j. 3.* 8a/b.

[152] See below p. 316.

was disapproved by some local leaders who therefore separated from him.[153] All this shows how precarious Yao's position as sect leader was. Although he was a capable organizer he could not prevent ambitious members to do their own business and to draw parts of his following to their communities. It took some years before he could consolidate his leadership, which was the more difficult as he had taken over a sect with an established and self-confident leadership that could not easily accept Yao's claim to primacy.

However, it was not only personal resentment but also material interest that made the founding of independent sects attractive. The financial contributions that sect leaders demanded from their followers secured them income and wealth. In the case of Yao Wenyu this is particularly manifest. While he was a poor seller of cakes before he started his sectarian career, he ended as a rich landowner whose granaries were overfilled with rice and the treasuries full of gold, silver, and gems. This wealth drew the attention of officials who demanded a levy to contribute to the costs of the local militia. Since Yao refused, they sent soldiers and captured him. He was killed on the twenty-ninth day of the fifth month in 1646.[154]

Yao Wenyu left behind a vast sect empire that extended far beyond his home province of Zhejiang to Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Fujian, Anhui, and Guangdong. The sect was organized hierarchically and on a regional basis in three main branches led by Yao Wenyu, Puli, and Pubo. The main branches were divided into seven or five subbranches that were further split into smaller units. At least in theory the sect hierarchy comprised seven levels.[155] These different levels were called "generations" (*dai* 代), which shows the nature of this organization structure. It was based on the hierarchical relationship between teacher and disciple. Every *huashi* (conversion master) could convert new members who became his disciples and thus belonged to his subbranch. If an ordinary member had been bestowed the title of *huashi,* he or she could convert disciples of their own and thus form a new subbranch

[153] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 8b-9a.

[154] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 32b-34b.

[155] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 9b-15a, where the names of the office holders in the upper three levels are listed. They still have the title *huashi* that had been introduced by Yin Ji'nan, however their number far surpassed the original twenty-eight. Some of the positions on the third level are left free, which shows that the formalized organization was not completely put into practice. It was the blue-print of an ideal organization structure designed "to be continued forever" (15a).

on a lower level. In this way there were several "generations" of disciples that all derived from the top position of the "saint teacher" Yao Wenyu and his first two disciples Puli and Pubo. This hierarchical system regulated not only the distribution of power and prestige but also of income. The financial contribution of members and the fees paid for initiation and conferment of titles and positions were channelled through the hierarchy giving each office holder his share. Thus, there was a strong impetus to rise within the hierarchy by attracting new members. The remarkable growth in membership and the spreading of the sect over many provinces was certainly promoted by this system, which allowed every member to become a receiver of income if he or she succeeded in gaining converts. The system explains the enormous riches that the top leader Yao Wenyu could amass through his sectarian career.

The same system that accounts for the efficiency of many sect organizations also contains the germ of disintegration. It is not surprising that successful proselytizers and heads of subbranches were tempted to set up on their own, which allowed them to keep the income otherwise transferred to the higher levels of the sect hierarchy. Since the sect leaders could barely rely on physical means of coercion to enforce their claim to leadership, much depended on their personal authority and the religious justification of their position. As we have seen, Yao Wenyu's position was not unquestioned after he had taken over a large branch of what had been Yin Ji'nan's sect. Accordingly, secessions were a major problem during the early years. His later success shows that he was able to consolidate his position after the main competitors had left the sect and he had introduced the new hierarchical organization.[156] However, with his death, the unifying bond of his authority had disappeared and the position of sect leader was vacant, and contest for leadership was then unavoidable. There were several factions following different leaders, but according to sect historiography these "heresies" were finally wiped out when in 1650 Yao's second wife, née Zhou 周, was recognized by most branch heads as leader of the sect. She died in 1671, and her son Pufa 菩法 succeeded her.[157] Thus, leadership of the sect, which was now called *Lingshan zhengpai* 靈山正

[156] Internal competition did not completely cease during the later years. As late as 1642 Yao Wenyu had to deal with sect members who disputed his legitimacy (*Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 16a/b).

[157] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 35b-37a.

派 (Orthodox Branch of the Numinous Mountain) had become hereditary. When in the middle of the eighteenth century the *Laoguan zhaijiao* was investigated because of its involvement in a revolt, its leaders still belonged to the Yao family.

There is no need to follow the further history of the sect founded by Yao Wenyu in detail.[158] Suffice it to note that the branch led by Yao's descendants was not the only one, as the *Sanshi yinyou* suggests. The centrifugal dynamics outlined above did not cease with the succession of Yao Wenyu's son, but were a constant factor that continued to produce offshoots of existing organizations. One of these offshoots is the *Longhua jiao* 龍華教 (Dragon-Flower Teaching), which was brought from Fujian to Taiwan, where it still exists today. In this branch the fourth patriarch is not Yao Wenyu's son Pufa but Tang Puxiao 湯菩宵, who was the leader of a subbranch in Yao's organization.[159] Many other sects developed that were in some way related to Yao Wenyu, of which only one should be mentioned here. As we have seen above[160] the *Laoguan zhaijiao* was also called *Dacheng jiao*, which is a name that occurs time and again. In the late eighteenth century we find a teacher, Wu Zixiang 吳子祥, who according to an official investigation

> transmitted the *Dacheng jiao*, alias *Sancheng jiao* 三乘教 (Teaching of the Third Vehicle). This teaching started with a man of the Ming dynasty surnamed Luo and the *dharma* name Puren 菩仁. He transmitted [his teaching] to his disciple surnamed Yin 殷 with the *dharma* name Puneng 菩能 who in turn transmitted it to his disciple Yao Dayu 姚大宇, a man from Qingyuan 慶元 county in Zhejiang with the *dharma* name Pushan. This teaching spread and was transmitted to many disciples. It was called *Yaozu jiao* 姚祖教 (Teaching of the Patriarch Yao). When it came to Wu Zixiang, who wrote a *Dacheng dajie jing* 大乘大戒經 (*Scripture on the Great Precepts of the Great Vehicle*), it was called *Dacheng jiao* alias *Luozu jiao.* All members have the character *pu* in their affiliation name.[161]

[158] For an extensive treatment see Ma Xisha, "Jiangnan Zhaijiao yanjiu," and Ma/Han, pp. 353–368.

[159] Wang Jianchuan, "Longhua jiao yuanliu tansuo," p. 18.—Puxiao's subbranch belonged to the branch of Pubo 菩伯 who was one of seven leaders of the middle branch headed by Yao Wenyu (*Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 11a). In the nineteenth century, de Groot found in Fujian another branch of the Longhua sect that did not derive from Puxiao but from Puying 菩應, who was also a disciple of Pubo's 菩伯 (De Groot, *Sectarianism*, p. 234).

[160] Cf. below p. 251.

[161] *JJCLFZZ*, Jiaqing 19/5/22 (1814), memorial by Dong Gao 董誥, quoted in Ma/Han, pp. 371 f.

If this is a reliable information,[162] then Wu Zixiang's *Dacheng jiao* was related to Yao Wenyu. Now, Wu Zixiang, who died in 1784, is a well-known figure in the history of popular sects. He is respected as tenth patriarch by the *Xiantian dao* 先天道 (Way of the Former Heaven) and the *Yiguan dao* 一貫道 (Way of Penetrating Unity), which became one of the most important sects in the twentieth century. The connection of *Xiantian dao* and *Yiguan dao* with sects belonging to the Luo traditions is noteworthy because they are considered to be typical examples of Maitreya sects, a tradition that some scholars believe to be clearly separated from the Luo sects. Evidently, sect connections are too complex to allow such classifications. No later than one generation after Patriarch Luo, belief in the Eternal Mother and expectation of the coming Buddha Maitreya were part of Yin Ji'nan's teaching. Two centuries later, by the middle of the Qing dynasty, the various sectarian traditions had so many points of intersections that it is hardly possible to find any "pure" line of transmission.[163]

3. The Dynamics of a Popular Religious Movement

The development of Patriarch Luo's movement may be compared to the growth of a tree, or rather a bush. Its roots are relatively easy to identify, and in the beginning there are only one or two shoots. Yet as it grows more and more offshoots develop and it is impossible to say

[162] It should be observed that for a number of reasons official investigations are not always reliable. First, the officials could only report what arrested sect members or other informants told them. Even if they revealed what they knew it was in many cases hearsay. Thus, at best this information has the qualities of oral traditions. We are, of course, fortunate to have such traditions, but their historical content is obviously not beyond any doubt. Second, officials often enlarged their reports with information they had in their files. Since they not always fully understood the nature of popular religious groups, they sometimes confused information that referred to different sects. In the case of Wu Zixiang's *Dacheng jiao* it may well be that the author of the report based his account of the early history of this sect on materials he had in his file. As the name *Dacheng jiao* appeared in earlier reports as an alternative name of the *Laoguan zhaijiao* he may have added information on this sect to his report. This was possibly a mistake, since the name *Dacheng jiao* was also used by sects that did not belong to Yao Wenyu's tradition.

[163] Even if we assume that Wu Zixiang's relation to Yao Wenyu's sect may be dubious, his relation to the Luo tradition is well established. Cf. Wang Jianchuan 王見川, "Xiantiandao qianqishi chutan. Jian lun qi yu Yiguandao de guanxi 先天道前期史初談 — 兼論其與一貫道的關係," in *Taiwan de Zhaijiao yu luantang* 臺灣的齋教與鸞堂, Taibei: Nantian shuju, 1996, pp. 75–114: 75–84.

which of them is the main branch. To make the picture more comprehensive we may add that on some branches shoots of other bushes are grafted, which brings about a bush with a variety of different leaves and blossoms. In this sense Luo Menghong's life and his *Five Books in Six Volumes* represent the roots. These roots proved to be extremely vigorous. However, the roots are not the same as the bush that grows out of them. Even if we could find out what the "correct" understanding of the "original" teaching of Patriarch Luo was, we would not know how these teachings were understood in the many sectarian groups that transmitted these scriptures. The "Luo sects" may have a common root, but they developed under the influence of many other traditions and external constraints. Although some of these groups were more conscious of their dependence on Patriarch Luo's teachings than others, there is no way to define an "orthodox" branch of the Luo tradition. Of course, many sects claimed to represent the orthodox line of transmission, but since none of them was recognized as such by external authorities there was no standard on which a claim to orthodoxy could be based. What remained was a variety of sectarian groups convinced to transmit the only correct way to reach salvation.

Judging from Patriarch Luo's *Five Books in Six Volumes,* his teachings contained nothing that could have been regarded by the authorities as politically dangerous or subversive. Luo's criticism of other sectarian traditions shows his endeavour to keep a distance from religious movements considered heterodox. The support he received from members of the educated class confirms that his teachings had nothing objectionable to them. Wealthy merchants and literati backed the numerous printed editions of Luo's writings during the Ming dynasty. Furthermore, among his followers were monks who probably regarded his writings as being in accord with the Buddhist teachings. This all suggests that Luo Menghong's religious message was understood by these supporters as a sort of reformed lay Buddhism close to the state-approved Buddhist orthodoxy. It may well be that the Luo Teaching would have developed into a respected lay movement within the realm of orthodox Buddhism, had there not been restraints that prevented it from doing so.

The course of development of a religious movement is affected by a number of external and internal factors. The religious message of its founder is just one of them. It certainly is important to observe that the teaching of the *Five Books in Six Volumes* does not seem to differ much from orthodox Buddhist beliefs, but it is equally important to

note that the representatives of orthodox Buddhism had another impression. In their view Luo's teaching was by no means a correct understanding of Buddhism since, as the famous monk Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 remarks, "it was totally ignorant of the existence of the Three Jewels."[164] At least the *saṃgha*, the third of the Three Jewels, had been abandoned in Luo's teaching, which was unacceptable to orthodox monks. Thus, after his teaching had gained a considerable following by the late sixteenth century, it was rejected by the leading monks.[165] At about the same time, government officials were concerned about the increasing popularity of religious movements belonging to the Luo tradition and demanded prohibitions.[166] Roughly half a century after the Patriarch's death his movement had thus been identified as a heterodox teaching by both clerical and state authorities. This alone was an important factor that affected the further development of the Luo Teachings. Followers of the Luo Teachings knew that they were in a risky position. Although their communities were usually tolerated by the authorities, there was the threat of repression and persecution. As they were considered deviant groups, their self-understanding was influenced by the perception of their social environment.

There were two main tendencies to deal with the status of deviance. One was the attempt to gain a recognized position and thus to remove the label of heterodox teaching. Already the third edition of Patriarch Luo's *Five Books in Six Volumes*, which was published in 1518, had a faked imperial certificate to give the impression that the distribution of these scriptures was approved by the emperor. Similar certificates were still in use during the eighteenth century.[167] While such faked "dragon plates" (*longpai*) tried to secure protection against political repression, there were also attempts to gain recognition as orthodox Buddhist teaching. In 1618 the Ministry of Rites in Nanjing reported that three

[164] *Hanshan dashi nianpu shuzhu* 憨山大師年譜疏註, Taibei: Laogu wenhua shiye gongsi, 1984 (1986), *j.* 1, pp. 52–53, translated in Daniel L. Overmyer, "Boatmen and Buddhas: The Lo Chiao in Ming dynasty China," *History of Religions*, 17, no. 3/4 (1978), pp. 284–302: 289.

[165] For quotations from Mizang Daokai, Hanshan Deqing and Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲袾宏 see Overmyer: "Boatmen and Buddhas," pp. 287–289.

[166] See above p. 235, note 72.

[167] See Ma/Han, p. 182; Wang Jianchuan, "Xiantian dao qianqishi chutan," pp. 81–84.—Facsimile reprints of such "dragon plates" (*longpai* 龍牌) can be found in the *Longhua keyi* 龍華科儀 (Taizhong: Minde tang, 1997, second and third plate after page 17). One of them seems to be the certificate of the 1518 edition of the *Wubu liuce*, the other one bears the date 1680 (Kangxi 19).

persons belonging to the *Wuwei jiao* had privately printed more than nine-hundred copies of the *Wubu liuce* and then tried to have them included in the Buddhist canon.[168] To achieve a recognized status as a *bona fide* teaching was particularly important to those adherents of the Luo Teaching who belonged to well-to-do and educated classes. They were not likely to follow a heterodox or subversive teaching since they had much more to lose than to gain by such an association. Their own social status did not allow them to belong to a deviant religious movement unless they were prepared to sacrifice their social position. Therefore, they had a paramount interest in removing the label of heterodoxy from Patriarch Luo's writings and presenting them as an orthodox teaching.

Another way to respond to the ascribed status of deviance was to accept it. Obviously, this was much easier for persons who already belonged to a deviant or marginalized milieu than for those who had to lose a respected social status. A good example are the boatmen congregations whose members represented the very lowest level of society. Hard working and badly paid, without family and possessions they had little to lose but much to gain from membership in a religious community. The material assistance of their religious brethren and the spiritual comfort offered by the religious teachings far outweighed the risk of belonging to a heterodox movement. The canal sailors certainly are an extreme case of a marginalized group, but there were many others whose fate was not much better. Landless peasants, itinerant artisans and peddlers, widows and orphans without family support, they all had little reason to care about a loss of social status. The social background of the sect founders mentioned above shows remarkable similarities. Several became orphans at an early age. Luo Menghong lost his mother at the age of three and his father when he was five years old. He was a soldier before he became disciple of a religious teacher. Yin Ji'nan's mother died when he was three, his father when he was seven.[169] He was given to a monastery by his uncle. Yao Wenyu lost his mother when he was five. His family was very poor and he had to herd ducks when he was young. Later he made his living selling cakes.[170] Sun Zhenkong likewise was extremely poor and without any

[168] Ma/Han, p. 183, quoting *Nangong shudu* 南宮暑牘, *j.* 4.

[169] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 37a.

[170] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 1a-3a.

education. He lived in a monastery but worked as a woodcutter.[171] All these men improved their status considerably when they became leaders of a religious following. They earned not only respect but also material benefits. Their new status as sect leaders did not depend on the recognition by the cultural and political elites but on the recognition by their audience. Accordingly, they had to respond to the expectations of their followers much more than to the demands of political or clerical authorities.

Thus, the Luo movement unfolded in different social contexts. If we construct extreme types, then on the one hand there were believers with a Buddhist background and traditional education. They had the material means and social connections to have books printed to present Luo's teachings to a learned audience. The other extreme were illiterate people belonging to the underprivileged classes who knew little more about Buddhism than the names of buddhas and the practice of *nianfo.* Of course, these are extremes, but they help to understand the different dynamics affecting the development of this movement. The social and cultural background of the respective audiences considerably influenced the way in which Luo's teachings were understood and processed. On the one hand there was the interpretation of his scriptures in terms of Chan Buddhism, while on the other his teachings were translated into the language of popular religious symbolism. Both interpretations were not mutually exclusive. They marked the two extremes and it depended on the circumstances which of them was emphasized by a sectarian community or an individual believer. Even within the same sectarian tradition it was possible to shift between these interpretations. Thus, the 1652 *Kaixin fayao* edition of Luo's *Five Books in Six Volumes*, which includes Lanfeng's and Wang Yuanjing's Chanist interpretations to the Patriarch's scriptures, was published by Pushen 菩伸. Pushen, however, was a follower of Yin Ji'nan,[172] who, as we have seen, had combined Luo's teachings with Maitreya and Eternal Mother symbolism. That Pushen preferred the "orthodox" Chan interpretation can be understood if we consider his family background. Already his father Pubang 菩榜 had belonged to one of the branches of Yin Ji'nan's sect,

[171] *Xiaoshi zhenkong saoxin baojuan,* in *BJCJ,* vol. 18, p. 401 f.

[172] *Kugong wudao baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao, j.* 1, *shou* 首, pp. 8–10. That Pushen belonged to Yin Ji'nan's sect cannot be doubted since he considers Yin as the reincarnation of *Wuji shengzu* i.e., Patriarch Luo.

which was brought to Anhui by Puji 菩記.[173] Being very poor in his youth, Pubang later became a successful and wealthy merchant and leader of this branch.[174] Since Pubang and his son Pushen had acquired wealth and social status, they could not be interested in being associated with sectarian teachings that stressed such suspect elements as the belief in the coming of Maitreya. The memory of Xu Hongru's 徐鴻儒 uprising in 1622 was still alive and pressure on popular sects continued after the founding of the Qing dynasty.[175] The Maitreya teaching adopted by Yin Ji'nan was less attractive to members of the higher classes who preferred the more sophisticated and individualistic Chan interpretation of Luo's writings.

For the underprivileged, however, it was exactly the teaching about the advent of a new time ruled by Maitreya, which gave them hope. The message to belong to the elected few who will be saved by the Eternal Mother or enjoy the purified world of the future was attractive for those who had little to lose in the present world. For them the mutual support and solidarity exchanged by the fellow members was much more important than for the wealthy. Hence, collective participation and explicit membership were stressed to mark the line between those who deserve support and those who do not. Since membership brought not only spiritual but also material benefits, access to it had to be regulated and the borders to outsiders be maintained. This fostered the development of close-knit sectarian groups where formal initiation and high personal commitment were demanded. Some of the sects that grew out of the Luo movement show clear traces of this development. The opening of the Mysterious Pass (*xuanguan*) and the conveyance of secret mantras, which are attested in several scriptures,[176] show the

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[173] Puji is mentioned as first of the twenty-eight *huashi* in Yin Ji'nan's organization. He was leader of community in Fengyang 風陽, which seems to be a misspelling for 鳳陽 in the north of Anhui (*Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 40a).

[174] *Chongkan buzhu jing houba* 重刊補註經後跋, appended to the 1652 *Kaixin fayao* edited by Pushen (*Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao, j.* 4, p. 137 f).

[175] For the Xu Hongru uprising see below p. 379.—The Manchus continued the Ming legislation against sects. Furthermore, already in 1646 a memorial had reported on the alarming activities of various sects, such as *Bailian, Dacheng, Hunyuan* and *Wuwei jiao* and demanded government action against them (*Donghua lu* 東華錄, *Shunzhi* 6, 7b, referring the sixth month of the year Shunzhi 3 i.e., 1646).

[176] See for example *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 13b, 31a/b, 35a; *Foshuo xiaoshi bao'an baojuan,* in *BJCJ,* vol. 6, pp. 38, 64 f, 68, 372; *Xiaoshi zhenkong saoxin baojuan,* in *BJCJ,* vol. 18, p. 528; *BJCJ,* vol. 19, p. 39. These secret practices were probably not confined

importance of initiation rituals. Membership in the community of the elect, who were destined to meet the true teaching, was the prerequisite for mutual support as well as for salvation. Only those who are "destined" (*youyuan ren* 有緣人) will be saved, teaches Sun Zhenkong,[177] and Yao Wenyu repeats almost verbatim Patriarch Luo: "Those who are destined will certainly meet [this teaching] even if they are thousands of miles away, while those who are not destined will hardly encounter it in eternity even if it is right before their face."[178] This exhibits a spirit of exclusiveness that draws a sharp line between the members of one's own community and the "world." The true believers are not part of the world. They do not belong to the ordinary world of the ignorant who do not know the truth and will, therefore, not be saved. The clear distinction between the community of the elect and the ordinary society implies a certain tension, it even demands a certain tension. Hostility on the part of the unenlightened verifies the extraordinary status of the elected community. The lower the social status of sect members is by the standards of the ordinary society, the more attractive is a teaching that regards this society and its standards as worthless. To replace the ordinary standards by the belief in one's own religious superiority is more satisfying than to accept the standards of the surrounding society and thereby admit one's one inferiority. Disregarding the norms and values of the ordinary society, however, means to be deviant. Thus, for some people a deviant religious group has a greater appeal than a religious teaching that shares the dominant views and values.

These considerations allow us to comprehend some aspects in the development of the Luo movement. Although in Luo's writings the teachings of other popular movements and particularly the belief in the advent of Maitreya are criticized, in many sects that grew out of his movement the teaching of the three cosmic periods and the coming of Maitreya was adopted. Such beliefs clearly departed from the state approved Buddhist orthodoxy. While Luo's original scriptures could be interpreted in a way that may have been still acceptable to the political and clerical authorities, this was far more difficult for the belief in the coming of a new time ruled by Maitreya. The more

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to the initiation of neophytes but part of *neidan* practices to which initiation was given on several levels.

[177] *Xiaoshi zhenkong saoxin baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 18, p. 545.

[178] *Sanshi yinyou*, *j.* 3, 31b. For a similar statement by Patriarch Luo see above p. 225.

prominent such beliefs were, the higher the tension between these communities and the mainstream society became. This increase in tension coincided with the formation of sects with a large following from the lower and underprivileged classes. For them, internal cohesion was more important than external recognition, and internal cohesion was strengthened by high tension with the surrounding society. The inclusion of beliefs that were considered heterodox reflects changes in the social composition of the Luo movement.

On the other hand, as we have seen, there was a tendency to reduce tension and make the teaching acceptable to the elites. The more individual believers were integrated in the majority society, the less they were inclined to embrace a deviant teaching. The costs of deviance increased with the social status. Thus, there were two conflicting tendencies within the Luo movement, and it depended largely on the social composition of a given community which of them prevailed. Since the social composition was subject to change in the course of time, there could be considerable variations in the interpretation of scriptures and teachings even within the same community. Communities that existed for many generations were likely to reduce tension, if they were allowed to do so. This was the case with the vegetarian sects in Taiwan, which in the nineteenth century were hardly discernible from Buddhist lay communities. However, in many cases such a development was made impossible by the pressure exerted on sectarian movements by the political authorities. In imperial decrees and official memorials the differences between various groups within the Luo movement were rarely taken into account. When, beginning in the late sixteenth century, the Luo movement and anything connected with it had been identified as a social and political problem by the authorities, there was little room to escape the label of heterodoxy. Hence, there were also external factors contributing to the increase in tension between sectarian groups and the dominant culture. The ascribed status of deviance produced its own dynamics reinforcing existing tendencies within the Luo movement to merge with other sectarian traditions and to raise tensions.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SPECTRUM OF POPULAR RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS IN LATE MING

The previous chapter focused on religious movements that derived or claimed to derive from Patriarch Luo. The Luo Teaching is by far the best known new religious movement of the Ming dynasty. This is partly due to the extraordinary popularity that Patriarch Luo's writings gained during the last five hundred years and the great number of religious groups that venerated Luo as their patriarch. But there are also historical coincidences that attracted the attention of scholars. In the nineteenth century, Jan Maria de Groot came into contact with sects of the Luo movement during his stay in Fujian and made them known to Western scholars. Communities of the same tradition flourish in Taiwan to the present day, where they received the attention of Japanese and Chinese scholars. We may also mention that archival materials on the Luo movement published during the Republican era far surpassed the number of published documents dealing with other popular religious movements. To some degree the history of research tended to reinforce the central role of this tradition. Yet, while the lasting influence of Patriarch Luo and his movement is beyond doubt, the fact should not be overlooked that it was just one important strand in a complex texture of popular religious movements during the last half millennium. Beginning in the sixteenth century, several other movements surfaced that gained considerable popularity and in certain circles even outshone the Luo movement. They produced a vast number of scriptures that were printed and widely distributed. Some beliefs propagated in these scriptures became part of the common stock of popular religious teachings during late Ming and Qing. Most important among them were teachings of salvation through divine messengers sent by the Eternal Mother or other primordial deities to rescue the elected saints of the latter days. So popular were these ideas that even groups that revered the scriptures of Patriarch Luo adopted them and thus merged with the large stream of popular religious movements which had been refuted in the Patriarch's writings.

No less significant were ritual forms and methods of meditation. In Patriarch Luo's scriptures there are only dim allusions to such practices, which are generally considered futile and contradicting his teaching of non-action (*wuwei*). However, there were other movements where practices of inner alchemy (*neidan*) and public rituals were esteemed as means for salvation. Should we apply the usual categories to classify Chinese religions, these movements would be considered to be nearer to the Daoist tradition, whereas the Luo Teaching bears stronger similarities to certain forms of Buddhism. The spectrum was further broadened by movements with a more Confucian flavour. However, such classifications must be applied with caution, since they suggest clearer boundaries between these traditions than actually existed. They all provided symbolic forms, verbal, ritual, and iconographic, which could be used to express a wide range of religious conceptions. The meaning of these symbols was not fixed, but open to interpretation depending on the changing contexts in which they were used. The literary traditions of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism provided such contexts, and to the degree they prevailed in a given cultural milieu they shaped the interpretation of certain symbols. However, the popular traditions, which were not part of the literary discourses of elites but nevertheless penetrated all layers of society, provided a different context that could give alternative meanings to the same symbols. It is, therefore, not much more than a tribute to conventional classifications if we refer to popular religious movements as being more or less indebted to either Buddhism, Daoism or Confucianism.

1. Popular Religious Teachings in Early Ming

The new religious movements emerging in the sixteenth century were in many ways different from earlier movements. However, they grew out of a centuries-old tradition of popular religions that provided a reservoir of symbols and patterns of world interpretation. When Luo Menghong in the late fifteenth century founded his movement, he was well aware of other sectarian groups in his time. Among the sects he particularly mentions is the *Bailian* jiao* 白縺教, which probably refers to the White Lotus Teaching, although it is written with a different character.[1] Luo describes the *Bailian* jiao* as a heretical teaching mis-

[1] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan,* ch. 18, in *BJCJ,* vol. 3, pp. 240–

leading ignorant people. They worship sun and moon, burn paper (money or images?) on their altars, and practise a method of divination by gazing into water where they see the semblance of dukes, marquises, and earls.[2] Whatever this *Bailian* jiao* was, it certainly was different from the White Lotus movement founded by Mao Ziyuan. Another sect criticized by Luo is the *Xuangu jiao* 玄鼓教 (Dark Drum Teaching), whose adherents also worship sun and moon as father and mother.[3] Almost nothing is known about this sect from other sources,[4] but at the end of the sixteenth century the worship of sun and moon was a distinctive feature of the *Huangtian jiao.* The third sect explicitly deprecated in Luo's *Five Books in Six Volumes* is the *Mile jiao* (Maitreya Teaching), which is said to write talismans and incantations (*shu fuzhou* 書符咒).[5] This is not very much information about other sects, but it shows that in the time of Patriarch Luo other popular religious movements did exist and Luo was aware of them.

Luo's vague remarks do not permit clear identification of the sectarian groups he mentions. The expectation of Maitreya was widespread in popular religious milieus even in the medieval ages, and the name *Mile jiao* could be applied to many groups. The same is true for *Bailian jiao*, which during the Ming dynasty became a common label for popular religious groups considered heterodox, as has been meticulously shown by ter Haar.[6] We do not need to repeat his arguments here, suffice it to note that none of the popular religious movements of the Ming and Qing dynasties used the name *Bailian jiao* (White Lotus Teaching) to refer to itself. Equally important is the observation that not a single

253. The repeated use of the character *lian** 縺 (marked with an asterisk) is puzzling because it is very rare, and cannot be a mistake for the much more common *lian* 蓮.

[2] This practice is known as karma mirror (*yejing* 業鏡). For a discussion see ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings,* pp. 169 f. The images seen in the water were interpreted as showing a person's future incarnation. Ter Haar notes that the practice was widespread among all layers of society from at least the late Tang, without ever being associated with heterodoxy. A similar practice, where mirrors are used instead of a bowl of water, is attested as early as 613 in the case of Song Zixian (see above p. 118).

[3] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan,* ch. 19, in *BJCJ,* vol. 3, p. 259 f.

[4] The *Xuangu jiao* is mentioned twice in the *Hongyang wudao mingxin*, which was probably published towards the end of the sixteenth century (*BJCJ,* vol. 16, pp. 223, 232). No details are given.—According to Overmyer (*Precious volumes,* p. 131), a *Xuangu jiao* 懸鼓教 (Suspending Drum Teaching), where sun and moon are worshipped, is also mentioned in the *Xiaoshi Anyang shiji baojuan* 銷釋安養實際寶卷 (*Precious scroll that explains the true situation of the [Land of] Tranquil Nourishment*).

[5] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan,* ch. 19, in *BJCJ,* vol. 3, p. 256 f.

[6] Ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings,* chapters four to six.

case is known where Mao Ziyuan, the founder of the White Lotus Society, was included in the list of sect patriarchs or even regarded as founding patriarch. Whatever the term *Bailian jiao* means in the sources from the fifteenth century, it certainly does not refer to the lay Buddhist movement founded by Mao Ziyuan during the Song dynasty. Ter Haar has introduced the term "new style White Lotus" to designate heterodox religious movements of the Ming and Qing that were classified as *Bailian jiao* but differed considerably from the "old style White Lotus" founded by Mao Ziyuan. The label *Bailian jiao* appears to have gained currency not before the end of the fifteenth century and was applied only in retrospective to religious movements of the early Ming. Some scholars regard the scattered references to religious "incidents" in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as examples of White Lotus activities.[7] However, as ter Haar has observed, out of the 43 cases listed by Noguchi for the time between 1386 and 1450, the name White Lotus appears only three times.[8] This does not imply that the tradition of the "old style" White Lotus movement had disappeared, but it shows that the name *White Lotus* was not widely used. One possible explanation may be the legislation of the Ming dynasty. Soon after the founding of the dynasty various forms of popular religious activities and organizations had been officially criminalized, and the White Lotus Society was explicitly mentioned in this context. Thus, there was good reason for groups belonging to the "old style" White Lotus tradition to avoid this name, and little reason for other religious groups to adopt it.

We cannot know, therefore, to which tradition Luo Menghong refers when he criticizes the *Bailian* jiao*. However, since he mentions the worship of sun and moon, it is clear that it was not the "old style" White Lotus movement. In general, information about popular religious movements before Luo is so scarce that it is not possible to trace the development and historical connections of particular traditions. On the other hand, there cannot be any doubt that many of the beliefs and practices that in the sixteenth century were incorporated into the emerging new religious movements were known even in early Ming times. This is most evident in the role Maitreya played in popular religious movements of the Ming and Qing. Belief in the coming of Maitreya had been used as a mobilizing force in Han Shantong's uprising, and after the founding of the Ming dynasty it continued to

[7] See above note 2 on p. 210.

[8] Ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, p. 130.

inspire popular religious movements. Up to the middle of the fifteenth century the sources report eleven cases where Maitreya is explicitly mentioned.[9] We can be sure that these incidents, which led to persecutions by the authorities, were only the surface of a much larger stream of popular Maitreyism to which Luo Menghong refers in his criticism of the Maitreya Teaching (*Mile jiao*).

There is no information about large scale and enduring sectarian networks and little about scriptures used by popular religious groups before Patriarch Luo. In this regard the new religious movements of the late Ming and Qing dynasties appear to differ considerably from their early Ming precedents. It should be noted that the later sects usually venerated founding patriarchs who lived after Luo Menghong, or at best were his contemporaries. It thus seems to be justified to consider the time of Patriarch Luo as a turning point in the history of popular religious movements and the Luo Teaching as the paradigm of a new development. The most conspicuous change is the extensive use of scriptures. The formation of a literal tradition provided these new teachings with symbols of identity that endured even if particular social groups disappeared. Besides securing the identity and continuity, the use of scriptures expressed a certain affinity to the literary traditions of Chinese culture. The social spectrum of popular religious movements in the late Ming was much broader than in the centuries before and included members of the educated classes.

These new developments, which became manifest in the sixteenth century, are important enough to speak of a new epoch in the history of Chinese popular religions. However, the break was not a sudden one and there was probably more continuity than the sources allow us to discern. In fact, the use of scriptures was not really new. Since the *Taiping jing* (*Great Peace Scripture*) was presented to the throne in the first century BCE, scriptures always played a certain role in popular religious movements. They continued to be produced and transmitted throughout the centuries and the early Ming was no exception. Li Shiyu lists thirty-eight titles of scriptures used by heterodox groups during the Chenghua era (1465–1487).[10] Among them is the *Wugong jing* (*Scripture of the Five Lords*), a title that can be traced back to the twelfth century.[11]

[9] Ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, p. 130.

[10] Li Shiyu 李世瑜, *Baojuan zonglu* 寶卷綜錄, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961, p. 81.

[11] See above p. 188.

The same scripture, or scriptures with the same title, were used in the eighteenth century by religious groups that venerated Patriarch Luo.[12] This scripture, of which different versions still are in use, shows a remarkable continuity of prophetic traditions from the Song to the present day.[13] Thus, to a certain degree written texts always were part of popular religious traditions, but it was only during the Ming dynasty that texts were produced and printed on a large scale. While most of the local cults that continued to rely mainly on oral traditions left little permanent traces in history, some of the new religious movements founded in the sixteenth century gained lasting influence through their scriptures. Unlike the written traditions of earlier sects some of these scriptures have known authors, even if they often claimed to be revelations of supernatural origin. The number of popular religious texts increased in the following centuries, and by the eighteenth century they were commonly named *baojuan* (Precious Scrolls), thus forming a genre of its own in Chinese literature.

Huangji jieguo baojuan of 1430 (Precious Scroll on Karmic Results in the Period of the August Ultimate)

While Patriarch Luo's writings are the most famous examples of early *baojuan*, they were not the first. Luo himself quotes in his *Five Books in Six Volumes* numerous scriptures, some of which have the expression *baojuan* 寶卷 (Precious Scroll) in their title.[14] There is some disagreement among scholars about which scripture can be considered the first example of this literary genre,[15] but there is no doubt that sectarian *baojuan* were known before Luo Menghong. As a generic term *baojuan* refers to a genre of popular religious literature of various types.[16] For

[12] *Cf.* Ma/Han, pp. 398, 400.

[13] Five different versions of the *Wugong jing* are reprinted in volume 10 of *MJZJ*. Five more versions were kindly made available to me by Barend ter Haar. One of them (in short characters) is obviously printed during the People's Republic.

[14] For a list with the titles of all scriptures quoted by Luo see Zheng Zhiming, *Wusheng Laomu xinyang suyuan*, pp. 223–231.

[15] For a discussion see Ma Xisha 馬西沙, "Zuizao yibu baojuan de yanjiu 最早一部寶卷的研究," *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究, 1986, no. 1, pp. 56–72.; *id.*, *Minjian zongjiao zhi* 民間宗教志. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1998, pp. 103–109; Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, pp. 34–47; Che Xilun 車錫倫, "Zhongguo zuizao de baojuan 中國最早的寶卷," *Zhongguo wen zhe yanjiu tongxun* 中國文哲研究通訊, 6, no. 3 (1996), pp. 45–52.

[16] For *baojuan* as a literary genre cf. Randall Nadeau, "Genre classification of

the present purpose the use of the name *baojuan* is less important than the emergence of popular religious scriptures that originated and were used in sectarian contexts. Since the persecutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries not only forced these movements underground but also led to the physical destruction of their scriptures, many sectarian writings are lost. And much of the leftovers was probably destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Until recently no sectarian *baojuan* prior to the *Five Books in Six Volumes* seemed to have survived. Daniel Overmyer and Li Shiyu were the first to make known a scripture that precedes Patriarch Luo's writings no less than seventy-nine years: the *Foshuo Huangji jieguo baojuan* 佛說皇極結果寶卷, which was published in 1430.[17]

Following Overmyer, who has analysed this scripture thoroughly, the title may be translated as *The Precious Volume, Spoken by the Buddha, on the [Karmic] Results of [the Teaching of] the August Ultimate [Period]*.[18] It is an invaluable document since it establishes beyond any doubt that the literature of the new religious movements in late Ming did not start with Luo Menghong's writings, but stood in a tradition that goes back at least to the early Ming. The *Huangji jieguo baojuan* was apparently known more commonly as *Shouyuan baojuan* 收圓寶卷 (*Precious Scroll about Attaining Completion*), for this is the title by which the text refers to itself.[19] In its attempt to describe its superiority to all existing teachings, the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* states that "this one scripture completely encloses all *baojuan* of the world."[20] This shows that there were already other *baojuan* of similar type when the text was written. Thus, the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* was certainly not the first sectarian *baojuan*, even if it is the oldest known to exist to the present day.

Chinese popular religious literature: Pao-chüan," *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 21 (1993), pp. 121–128; Janet MacGregor Lynn Kerr, *Precious Scrolls in Chinese popular religious culture*, Ph.D. thesis: University of Chicago, 1994, pp. 1–22.

[17] Daniel L. Overmyer, and Li Shiyu, "The oldest Chinese sectarian scripture, 'The Precious Volume, Expounded by the Buddha, on the Results of [the Teaching of] the Imperial Ultimate [Period]' (Fo Shuo Huang-Chi Chieh-Kuo Pao-Chüan, Pub. 1430)," *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 20 (1992), pp. 17–31. See also Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, pp. 51–91. The scripture has been reprinted in vol. 10 of *BJCJ*.

[18] Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, p. 54 translates *The Precious Volume, Expounded by the Buddha, on the [Karmic] Results of [the Teaching of] the Imperial Ultimate [Period]*. I prefer to translate *huangji* 皇機 as "august ultimate" instead of "imperial ultimate."

[19] *Huangji jieguo baojuan* 佛說皇極結果寶卷, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 225) *et passim*, hereafter quoted as *Huangji jieguo baojuan*.

[20] *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, introduction, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 227.

The scripture often refers to other schools and teachings, which are generally despised as heretical. They are contrasted with the true teaching presented in this scripture and transmitted within the own community. It is evident that the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* was the scripture of a sectarian group that drew a sharp line between itself and other sects.[21] All this foreshadows the sectarian self-consciousness of the religious movements in late Ming and Qing and suggests a continuity not only in sectarian literature but also in sectarian types of organization. The scripture presents itself as a revelation existing since primordial times, which for those who listen to it will bring fortune and avert calamity.[22] Linguistic evidence shows that it was produced in north China,[23] the same region where the Luo tradition and most of the sixteenth-century sects originated. Since the scripture has been preserved through the centuries, we may assume that it was used by later sects. However, it is not known which tradition transmitted it.[24] The scripture itself gives various names for the congregation of believers,[25] but it seems that the name of the sect was *Shouyuan dao* 收圓道 (Attaining Completion Way).[26] Sects using the name *Shouyuan* (often written with different characters) are well attested since the seventeenth century. The *Longhua jing* lists a *Shouyuan* jiao*[27] 收源教 founded by the Shouyuan* Patriarch (*Shouyuan* zu* 收源祖).[28] A Shouyuan* Patriarch, who is awaited by all buddhas, is also mentioned in the *Huangji jindan jiulian zhengxin guizhen huanxiang baojuan* 皇極金丹九蓮正信皈真還鄉寶卷 (*Precious Scroll of the Golden Elixir and Nine[-Petalled] Lotus of the August Ultimate on Correct Belief to Revert to the Truth and Return to the Native Place*; short: *Jiulian*

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[21] For criticism of heretics and nonbelievers and sectarian self-consciousness cf. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes,* pp. 78–84.

[22] *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* introduction, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, pp. 228 f.

[23] Cf. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes,* pp. 290 f.

[24] According to Che Xilun 車錫倫 (*Zhongguo baojuan zongmu* 中國寶卷總目, Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, 1998, no. 190) the scripture was one of the *Five Scriptures in Nine Volumes* (*wujing jiu ce* 五經九冊) of the *Huangtian dao*. I could not find any confirmation of this view. Che states that the title of the scripture was *Foshuo huangji shouyuan baojuan* 佛説皇極收圓寶卷 and lists a further edition of the Qing dynasty.

[25] Cf. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes,* pp. 81 f.

[26] *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* ch. 1, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, p. 251, ch. 3 (p. 268), ch. 4 (p. 277).

[27] *Shouyuan** (marked by an asterisk) refers to the characters 收源 (attaining the source) to distinguish it from *shouyuan* 收圓 (attaining completion), *Shouyuan*† 收元 (attaining the origin), and *Shouyuan*$^{\#}$ 收緣 (attaining affinity).

[28] *Longhua jing,* ch. 23, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 373b.

baojuan), and the same scripture refers to the *Shouyuan* dao* 收源道 as the teaching leading to salvation.[29] We have an edition of *Jiulian baojuan* dated 1523, which is the earliest reference to the *Shouyuan dao* after the *Huangji jieguo baojuan*. Overmyer regards the two books as belonging to the same tradition.[30] Since the *Jiulian baojuan* was later transmitted in several important sects, the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* may have had a greater influence on the development of late Ming religious movements than it appears at first sight.[31]

In some respects its position in Chinese sectarian history may be compared to Patriarch Luo's writings. Of course, the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* did not equal the latter's fame and distribution, and its author remained anonymous. However, while the *Five Books in Six Volumes* stand for a class of sectarian *baojuan* that were rather close to Buddhist teachings, the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* is the first *baojuan* that introduced the principal symbols of modern popular sectarianism. Already the introductory chapter describes the phenomenal world as a sequence of three cosmic periods ruled in turn by the Buddhas Dīpaṃkara, Śākyamuni and Maitreya. They preside over three assemblies called *qingyang hui*, *hongyang hui*, and *baiyang hui* (Green *Yang*, Red *Yang*, White *Yang* Assembly) and administer three teachings called *Wuji jiao, Taiji jiao*, and *Huangji jiao* (Teaching of Limitless, Supreme Ultimate, and August Ultimate).[32] Here we have a basic set of symbols met again and again in later sectarian writings. However, another key symbol, the Unborn Mother, does not appear although a number of mother deities and matriarchs are mentioned, who are sometimes called *Laomu* (Venerable Mother).[33] These goddesses do however not symbolize a creative principle as in later scriptures. For this, another symbol is used: the Ancient Buddha (*gufo* 古佛), who is also referred to as the Ancient Buddha Unborn (*Gufo Wusheng* 古佛無生).[34] He reveals himself as creator of

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[29] *Huangji jindan jiulian zhengxin guizhen huanxiang baojuan* 皇極金丹九蓮正信皈真還鄉寶卷, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 306, 307.

[30] Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, p. 136.

[31] The name *Shouyuan† dao* 收元道 appears in eighteenth century official documents where it is associated with the *Huangtian jiao* (cf. Ma/Han, pp. 409 f). However, there is no evidence that this *Shouyuan† dao* is a continuation of the *Shouyuan dao* of the *Huangji jieguo baojuan*. The expression *shouyuan†* is rather common in sectarian contexts.

[32] *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, introduction, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, pp. 234 f, 238.

[33] *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, ch. 4, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 277.

[34] *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, introduction, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 237.

the whole cosmos who gave life to mankind.[35] Like the Unborn Mother in later *baojuan*, the Ancient Buddha is described as weeping in sorrow because his creatures have fallen into the world of sin.[36] And it is the Ancient Buddha who first transmitted this *Shouyuan baojuan* to disclose the way to return to the origin, and thus rescue humankind from the world of misery.[37]

The *Huangji jieguo baojuan* teaches the way leading to salvation as a cultivation method of ten steps (*shibu xiuxing* 十步修行), which the buddha describes as follows:

> First, you must worship Heaven and Earth, diligently offering incense. Be filial and caring toward your parents. Second, you must seek your original nature, transcending [the distinction between] the mundane and the sacred. Respectfully revere your ancestors. Third, you must know [the method of] coming down.[38] Without any sense of deception honour and respect your superiors. Fourth, you must offer incense during four hours [of the day][39] without cessation. Live in harmony with your neighbours and relatives. Fifth, you must know the four pure [forms of incense][40] and respond to the heavenly primordial (*tianyuan* 天元).[41] Be diligent and attentive in your occupation. Sixth, you must receive the [mantra of the] Ten Buddhas[42] and know the palaces and passes.[43] Teach and educate your sons and

[35] *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, ch. 10, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, pp. 339 f, cf. Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, p. 63.

[36] *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, introduction, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, pp. 241 f.

[37] *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, ch. 14, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 397.

[38] *Xialuo* 下落. The expression is mentioned repeatedly in chapter 3 without being exactly explained. It seems to be a method of concentration of the mind, cf. *BJCJ*, vol. 10, pp. 257, 266, 269, 270.

[39] *Si shi* 四時. The interpretation "four hours of the day" is supported by parallels. Cf. *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, pp. 279, 281 f.

[40] *Si jing* 四淨 refers to *si jing xiang* 四淨香, cf. *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, pp. 287–291.

[41] The meaning of *tianyuan* is not clear to me. *Tianyuan* is also a technical term in *neidan* Daoism signifying the state of complete inner cultivation as opposed to *renyuan* 人元, which signifies the complete state of cultivation of life (cf. Hu Fuchen, ed. 胡孚琛, *Zhonghua Daojiao da cidian* 中華道教大辭典, Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995, p. 1132). The terminology of *tianyuan* and *renyuan* appears in *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, ch. 5, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 293.

[42] *Shi fo* 十佛 refers to a mantra, cf. *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 299. It possibly is an abbreviation for a mantra in ten characters. The mantra has to be recalled without speaking hundred times a day (p. 300).

[43] This refers to the palaces and passes of the transcendental landscape, which have to be passed to ascend to heaven. It can also refer to palaces and passes of the inner landscape of the body, which have to be passed during meditation.

> grandsons. Seventh, you must dot the Mysterious Pass (*xuanguan*) to continue the Lotus School (*lianzong* 蓮宗).[44] Do not follow heretics and nonbelievers. Eighth, you must enter the Red Canopy [Heaven][45] by refining your original nature and penetrating the dark emptiness.[46] Ninth, you must enter the Vastness of Heaven and know the path of the three buddhas of the time after creation.[47] Tenth, you must receive marks and registrations to prove your position attained as a result [of your religious practice] and you can enter complete enlightenment[48] (*sanzhen* 三真).[49]

The ten steps of cultivation taught by the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* comprise different aspects. First there are ritual obligations towards Heaven and Earth, and moral obligations towards men: parents, ancestors and superiors, and also fellow men. The moral views of the book are completely conventional and in full accord with the prevailing ethics.[50] Another aspect are specific religious obligations of the followers of this teaching. Great weight is given to the regular offering of incense, which seems to have been the main ritual practice.[51] Equally important, however, are various aspects of inner cultivation. The second step

[44] Dotting the Mysterious Pass (between the eyebrows) is part of the initiation ritual. In this way the sect tradition is continued. "Lotus School" may be a reference to the White Lotus tradition, but there is no information that this kind of initiation was used there. It should be noted that the symbol "lotus" is very prominent in this and later sectarian writings, as for instance the nine petalled lotus of Maitreya. Thus, "Lotus School" possibly refers to this particular sectarian tradition.

[45] *Hong luo* 紅羅. Explained in ch. 8 (*BJCJ*, vol. 10, pp. 315–324). The exact meaning is difficult to understand. It is described as a transcendental world to which the soul proceeds after death. For this interpretation cf. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, pp. 65–67. On another level it may signify an inner world experienced during meditation. This interpretation is based on pp. 316–318. In the context of the ten steps of religious cultivation, "enter the *hongluo*" as eighth step does not make sense if it refers to an outer transcendental world.

[46] *Xuankong* 玄空 is possibly a reference to *xuanguan* (Mysterious Pass), which has to be opened in *neidan* practices and is dotted during the initiation ritual.

[47] *Houtian san fo* 後天三佛. *Houtian* means the time after heaven came into existence. It is opposed to *xiantian* 先天, which refers to the time before heaven and earth were separated i.e., the primordial state. The three buddhas of the time after creation are Dīpaṃkara, Śakyamuni and Maitreya. They are implicitly contrasted with the Ancient Buddha (*gufo*), who is the creator of everything and thus belongs to the *xiantian*.

[48] For this interpretation of *sanzhen* see below note 59.

[49] *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, ch. 9, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 328 f. The translation is based on Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, pp. 62 f, with some changes.

[50] They are described in more detail in *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, ch. 1, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, pp. 243–249.

[51] Incense was offered four times a day (ch. 4, pp. 281 f, ch. 5, p. 292).

already demands that one seek one's original nature, which is bestowed by Heaven and Earth.[52] To find one's original inner nature and to join it with one's physical nature (*ming* 命) brings liberation from the sea of suffering. This means transcending the distinction between the mundane and the sacred.[53] The methods by which the inner nature can be found and developed are not explained in detail. They seem to be methods of inner cultivation similar to the *neidan* practices of the Daoists. A central element is the opening of the Mysterious Pass (*xuanguan*), which is marked during the initiation ritual. It is a mysterious point on the crossroads between the eyebrows[54] that appears to be considered a microcosm. In it all buddhas and patriarchs, the whole world, heaven and earth are produced.[55] Through inner cultivation this Mysterious Pass or Dark Emptiness must be opened. "If one has passed the Mysterious Pass one proceeds to the Red Canopy Heaven, where the Golden Body (*jinshen* 金身) becomes manifest."[56] It remains obscure by which means the opening of the Mysterious Pass is accomplished, it certainly belonged to the esoteric teachings of the sect. But it obviously was a very important part of the cultivation path, which is even called the Great Way of the Mysterious Pass (*xuanguan dadao* 玄關大道).[57]

The last two steps concern the realms that will be entered after the Mysterious Pass has been passed. The Vastness of Heaven is a transcendental realm described in fantastic language, with a golden wheel, cloud towers, palaces, buddhas and patriarchs.[58] It is there where the marks and registrations are checked, which prove that all ten steps of the cultivation way have been accomplished. If this step is taken one enters *sanzhen* 三真, which is the state of complete enlightenment.[59]

We cannot go into more details of this text, which remains obscure in many regards. The interpretation presented here stresses the cultivation in ten steps. There is another layer of meaning that appears if we take the symbolic language more literally. On this level, numerous

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[52] *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* ch. 2, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, p. 261.

[53] *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* ch. 2, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, p. 258.

[54] *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* ch. 2, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, p. 261.

[55] *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* ch. 7, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, pp. 310 f.

[56] *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* ch. 7, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, p. 311.

[57] *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* ch. 7, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, p. 312.

[58] *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* ch. 9, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, pp. 332–334.

[59] *Sanzhen* is explained as entering *samyaksaṃbodhi* (*sanmiaosan puti* 三藐三菩提) in chapter 10 (*BJCJ,* vol. 10, p. 344).

deities, patriarchs and buddhas, appear as well as a celestial bureaucracy to check the correct titles and tablets, before one can further proceed on the ladder to heaven. This aspect has been extensively described by Daniel Overmyer and does not need to be repeated here. As will be shown in greater detail later, sectarian writings can have multiple layers of meaning and could, therefore, be understood in different ways by different readers. Read in one way, we find "an eschatological message, promising hope to the pious that they will survive the disasters at the end of the age and attain rebirth in paradise."[60] Read in a different way, we find a method of moral and spiritual cultivation that leads to the experience of transcendental worlds in this very life. It depended on the reader, which aspect was more important. Some may have desired developing their original nature to achieve complete enlightenment and transcend the mundane world. Others hoped for entering a celestial paradise after death. Whether the passes and palaces are located in heaven or within one's own body or mind remained open to the understanding of the reader. There is no way, and no need, to decide which is the correct understanding.

If we compare the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* with later sectarian teachings, we find that almost the complete reservoir of key symbols is ready. These symbols appear again and again, even if they may attain different meanings and prominence. Likewise, the basic structure of the religious message is apparent. Mankind is in need of salvation because it has lost its original unspoiled nature and is fallen into the world of sin and misery. A compassionate deity, which is the creator of everything, wants to lead its creatures back and reveals a book and a teaching to show the way to deliverance. All gods, patriarchs, and buddhas, including Maitreya, are merely agents of this work of salvation. It is the symbols used that change. The creator deity may be the Ancient Buddha Amitābha, or the Unborn Mother, or even Emptiness. There is also a certain continuity in ritual practices. The importance given in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* to the offering of incense calls to mind the Incense Gatherings (*xianghui*) of the Yuan dynasty. Offering incense remained an important ritual practice in later sects, such as the *Hongyang jiao*[61] and Wang Sen's 王森 "Incense Smelling Sect" (*Wenxiang jiao* 聞香教). Even more evident is the continuity of other ritual practices, such as recitation of mantras and opening of the Mysterious Pass, meditation,

[60] Overmyer, *Precious Volumes,* p. 54.

[61] See *Hongyang wudao mingxin*, ch. 2 (*BJCJ,* vol. 16, pp. 50–55).

and vegetarianism. They all were common in popular religious movements of later centuries.

The *Huangji jieguo baojuan* is the earliest known *baojuan* that clearly belongs to the religious milieu in which the new religious movements of the sixteenth century grew. This does not mean, however, that it should be regarded as the ancestor from which the later religious movements descended. There were certainly other scriptures and other sectarian communities that contributed to the new religions emerging in the sixteenth century. What makes the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* important to our understanding of later developments is that it testifies and illustrates a tradition of popular religious symbols apart from the symbolic language of the three official teachings. It is, as it were, the fourth current, which together with the other three contributed to the swelling stream of popular religious movements in late imperial China.

Jiulian baojuan (Precious Scroll about the Nine [-Petalled] Lotus)

The *Huangji jieguo baojuan* makes it sufficiently clear that in the first half of the fifteenth century the key symbols of the emerging new religious movements were available. Half a century before Patriarch Luo's enlightenment there were already sectarian groups with their own *baojuan.* Luo Menghong was well aware of such groups and criticized them as wrong teachings not leading to deliverance. Similar criticism of other sects appears already in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* and it became a topos to be found in many later scriptures. Its main function was to express the singular position of one's own teachings and scriptures and to secure the identity of the own community. Criticism of other sects does, however, not prove a fundamental difference of teachings and traditions. The tradition to which the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* belonged produced quite a number of sectarian groups that blamed each other as heterodox. The *Jiulian baojuan* (*Precious Scroll about the Nine [-Petalled] Lotus*), which was published in the early sixteenth century, mentions that there are "three thousand related schools promulgating ten thousand minor methods and rivalling for primacy. These dragons and snakes cannot distinguish between true and false, but they all use the title *Shouyuan zu* 收圓祖 (Attaining Completion Patriarch)."[62] This refers to the same tradition as the *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, which had the alternative

[62] *Huangji jindan jiulian zhengxin guizhen huanxiang baojuan,* ch. 17, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 310, hereafter quoted as *Jiulian baojuan* or *Jiulian jing.*

title *Shouyuan baojuan*. The *Jiulian baojuan* itself is part of this tradition, for it speaks of the *Shouyuan* zu* 收源祖 (Attaining the Source Patriarch) as the saviour, the Immeasurable Buddha who leads the saved to the precious land of the Cloud City to attend the Dragon-Flower Assembly.[63] Thus, by the time the *Jiulian baojuan* was published, there were many sects claiming to teach the Way for Attaining Completion (*Shouyuan dao*), as had done the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* and did the *Jiulian baojuan*.[64]

The full title of the *Jiulian baojuan* is *Huangji jindan jiulian zhengxin guizhen huanxiang baojuan* 皇極金丹九蓮正信皈真還鄉寶卷, which Overmyer translates as *The Precious Volume of the Golden Elixir and Nine[-Petalled] Lotus of the Imperial Ultimate Period [that Leads to] Rectifying Belief, Reverting to the Real, and Returning to [Our] True Home*.[65] The copy reprinted in volume eight of *Baojuan chuji* states that it is a reprint of the year 1523. This means that there was an earlier edition, which according to Lian Lichang must have been published after 1510.[66] Thus, the community that used the *Jiulian baojuan* was roughly contemporary to Patriarch Luo. Its affinity to the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* has already been observed by Overmyer.[67] Both books share a common stock of symbols, such as *huangji* (August Ultimate), *shouyuan* (Attaining Completion), *jindan* (Golden Elixir), *wuwei* (Non-Action), and many others. In the *Jiulian baojuan* these symbols are used to describe a mythological and eschatological scenario that amounts to "a complete statement of sixteenth-century sectarian mythology and teaching."[68] I shall shortly summarize these mythological aspects of the scripture that have been comprehensively treated by Overmyer.[69]

The mythological scenario is enclosed between the two poles of creation and future world. As in the *Huangji jiegou baojuan* the creator is called *Ancient Buddha* (*gufo*). He is the origin of all that exists. He has

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[63] *Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 16, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 306–308.

[64] That the *Jiulian baojuan* mostly uses the characters *shouyuan** 收源 (attaining the source) instead of *shouyuan* 收圓 (attaining completion) may be an attempt to set itself apart from the many other sects of the same tradition.

[65] Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, p. 136. Today, there are two different versions of the *Jiulian jing*. For details see appendix below "On the two versions of the *Jiulian jing*."

[66] Lian Lichang 連立昌, "«Jiulian jing» kao 《九蓮經》考," *Minjian zongjiao* 民間宗教, 2 (1996), pp. 113–120. Lian Lichang is in possession of an edition which he believes is the original print.

[67] Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, p. 136.

[68] Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, p. 176.

[69] Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, pp. 136–177.

created Heaven and Earth, the three cosmic periods and the buddhas ruling them, he also revealed the *Jiulian baojuan*. He is also the creator of mankind. Since men have lost the original true teaching and forgotten their origin, they fell into the world of desire and sin and became attached to the mundane. To lead them back to their divine origin, this scripture has been revealed. Those who follow its teaching will in the eighty-one *kalpas* of the future attain positions as buddhas and never be reborn on earth.[70] The book elaborates this general message in many mythological themes. Among them is the topos of the three Buddhas Dīpaṃkara, Śākyamuni, and Maitreya who in turn rule the past, the present, and the future.[71] Another central theme is the description of the disasters at the end of each age. The elect, who have received the message of the Ancient Buddha, will however escape the three disasters (*san zai* 三災) of water, fire, and wind, avoid the eight difficulties (*ba nan* 八難) and join the myriads of buddhas in the Cloud City.[72]

A puzzling feature of the *Jiulian baojuan* is that many names and symbols are used interchangeably. Thus, the Ancient Buddha, who is the source of all, orders Amitābha to descend and rescue humanity, but shortly afterwards it is the Venerable Mother (*laomu*) who issues this order,[73] and later the Jade Emperor (*Yudi* 玉帝) is mentioned as performing the same function.[74] The Ancient Buddha and the Venerable Mother seem to be different symbols referring to the same idea. Later in the book the creator is called *Zhenkong Shengzu* 真空聖祖 (Holy Patriarch of True Emptiness).[75] Similarly, Amitābha is repeatedly called buddha of the future,[76] while later Maitreya has this function. But

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[70] *Jiulian baojuan*, introduction, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 4–11. Cf. Overmyer's translation (*Precious volumes*, pp. 140–142).

[71] *Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 12, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 233–235. The names of the three assemblies (*hui* 會) differ slightly from the usual ones: *huangyang* 黃陽 (yellow *yang*), *qingyang** 清陽 (pure *yang*) and *hongyang*† 洪陽 (huge *yang*). The elsewhere usual sequence is *qingyang, hongyang, baiyang* as in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan*. In one instance, the *Jiulian baojuan* also calls the second assembly *baiyang* (ch. 12, *BJCJ* vol. 8, p. 236).

[72] *Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 11, cf. Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, pp. 158–160.

[73] *Jiulian baojuan*, introduction, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 25–29.

[74] *Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 4, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 69.

[75] *Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 14, p. 263. The symbol *zhenkong* is also used by Patriarch Luo to denote the creative principle, and he also equates it with the Mother. Cf. *Kugong wudao juan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 1, pp. 150 f.

[76] Cf. *Jiulian baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 26, 49.

Maitreya is also implicitly identified with the Ancient Buddha.[77] There are amazing lines of associations and identifications. Dīpaṃkara is called holy *Wuji* 無極 (Limitless), Śākyamuni venerable *Taiji* 太極 (Supreme Ultimate) and Maitreya is the *Wuwei zu* (Non-Action Patriarch),[78] a title that is elsewhere explained as meaning Amitābha.[79] Maitreya as the future buddha is associated with *Huangji* 皇極 (August Ultimate).[80] The same symbol is associated with the Venerable Mother who is called *Huangji Laomu* (Venerable Mother of the August Ultimate)[81] and said to dispense the Golden Elixir (*jindan*). Then the myriad buddhas, which means the elect who have realized their buddha nature, will together proceed to the court of Maitreya.[82] This turns the usual positions of Maitreya and the Venerable Mother upside down, since in other cases it is the *Wuwei zu,* that is, Maitreya, who offers the Golden Elixir,[83] and salvation is described as ascending to the Cloud City of the Venerable Mother.

Many other cases where different symbols substitute each other could be added. Some instances, as when the buddha of the future is called Amitābha in one place and Maitreya in another, are logical contradictions if we judge it by conventional logic. One possible explanation would be that the book combines different sources and traditions. However, it is difficult to imagine that the author or editor could have been unaware of such logical contradictions. We must assume that for him or her these were no contradictions because the book transcends conventional logic, which is based on making distinctions. It rather seems to advocate an understanding that abandons distinctions. Thus, the distinction between the three cosmic periods and the three buddhas, which is important in the mythological narrative, is negated in other contexts: "*Wuji, Taiji,* and *Huangji* together form one body."[84] Distinctions between the three buddhas are real on one level but illusive on another. Also the distinction between self and buddha is real only for the unenlightened:

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[77] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 12, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 234.
[78] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 12, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 233 f.
[79] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 11, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, p. 205.
[80] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 14, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 263.
[81] Cf. *BJCJ,* vol. 8, pp. 118, 119, 213.
[82] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 11, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 213.
[83] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 14, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 266.
[84] *Jiulian baojuan,* introduction, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 16.

> If you see that [your own] nature originally is not different from [the nature of] the buddha, you will all realize the state of no-birth[-and-death] (*wusheng* 無生) and proceed to the highest heaven. You will return home passing a straight way, and Heavenly Truth (*tianzhen* 天真) will receive all [you] buddhas.[85]

Salvation is here described as insight into the unity of self and the Absolute. Using mythological symbols, we would expect that it is the Venerable Mother who receives those who return home. But this is only one possible symbol to express the Absolute, one may also call it *Heavenly Truth.* Elsewhere it is explained that *Heavenly Truth* is just a conventional designation for the source of all:

> Producing heaven and producing earth, I am the most venerable; all the myriad *dharma*s are produced from my *Dao.* In the West I transformed into a golden immortal and completed the Buddhist teaching, and later in the Eastern Land I taught the Confucian school. I bequeathed the Three Teachings, limitless in scope; each distinguished good and bad and controlled the world. If you wish to ask my name, [it is] *Wuji* (Limitless), Laozi [or] Ancient Heavenly Truth (*gu tianzhen*).[86]

The speaker of this verses is the founding teacher (*zushi* 祖師), which here seems to refer to the *Wuwei zu* (Patriarch of Non-Action), who is also called Amitābha.[87] Thus, again we have an amazing line of identifications. He is Laozi, Buddha Śākyamuni, Confucius, and may also be called Limitless or Heavenly Truth. Names are not important, they are mere designations. To which reality they refer is difficult to say, the text oscillates between different symbols and changing associations. However, one feels that it contains a layer of meaning that goes beyond the mythological images. The interpretation of these images took place in a religious setting about which we do not know much. There are some hints that the author or editor of this scripture presented himself as an incarnation of Maitreya/Amitābha/*Wuji*/*Tianzhen*/Ancient Buddha/*Wuwei zu.* In any case it was believed that this divine manifestation has appeared in the world to proclaim the teaching of this book.[88]

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[85] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 11, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 206.

[86] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 4 (*BJCJ,* vol. 8, pp. 70 f), based on Overmyer's translation (*Precious volumes,* p. 147), with some changes.

[87] Cf. *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 11, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 205.

[88] There are repeated references to the *Wuwei zu* (Non-Action Patriarch) who has descended to reveal the Golden Elixir and save all buddhas i.e., those who have realized their true nature. He usually is said to "hide his name," which probably

One aspect of this teaching was the description of the threatening fate faced by men since they became attached to mundane emotions and forgot their origin. This fate is symbolized by the three disasters and eight difficulties. The other aspect is to reveal a way to salvation from this lost state and to avoid the three disasters and eight difficulties. The scripture mostly makes only cryptic allusions to the methods taught, but it is clear that one has to be a member of this sect to reach salvation:

> Those who are destined by their karma will board the golden boat and together leave the sea of suffering. They will meet the [Patriarch of] Non-Action (*wuwei*) who transmits the mantra and dots [the Mysterious Pass]. So they return to their origin and go back to their source. This teaching of the Golden Elixir (*jindan fa*) continues through the three cosmic periods, it opens [the gate of] heaven and shuts [the door of] the earth.[89] If they have penetrated the Mysterious Pass (*xuanguan*), the sacred body becomes manifest and together they will reach the Native Place.[90]
>
> One has to meet a teacher who dots and opens the aperture of the Mysterious Pass to manifest the future purple golden body.[91]

Already in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* transmission of a secret mantra and dotting the Mysterious Pass was part of the initiation. Proper initiation by a teacher was considered essential for the way to salvation. But there certainly were other secret methods opened to the initiate. The scripture mentions "a document for returning home, a diagram of the nine-[petalled] lotus, three-apexes incense, and the cultivation in ten steps."[92] Above all the cultivation in ten steps (*shibu xiuxing*) recalls the *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, which uses the same expression.[93] Although the *Jiulian baojuan* does not give any details about the ten steps, it is unmistakable that the transmission of a secret cultivation practice,

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means that he is already on earth but known only to the initiated. Cf. *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 14 (*BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 268) or ch. 13 (p. 253), where he is equated with the Venerable Ancient Buddha (*lao gufo*), and ch. 11 (p. 205), where his name is Amitābha.

[89] This interpretation is supported by a parallel in ch. 21 (*BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 388). This enigmatic phrase refers to certain *neidan* practices. Cf. below note 98.

[90] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 4 (*BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 77 f), based on Overmyer's translation (*Precious volumes*, pp. 148 f) with some changes.

[91] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 15, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 277.

[92] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 3, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 47.

[93] See above p. 277.

which is also called "skill of ten steps" (*shibu gong* 十步功),[94] is an indispensable part of the teaching.

> If this skill (*gongfu* 功夫) is practised for a long time, the clear mind will see the [original] nature. If the practice of this skill is completed, one will return home, recognize the patriarch, and go back to the source.[95]

From a number of passages it is clear that these practices involve some kind of meditation through which not only the *qi* is nourished but also the union with the Mother is attained.[96] The twenty-first chapter gives some significant details about the cultivation method:

> The founding teacher (*zushi*) transmits the Method of Non-Action (*wuwei fa*), the Great Way of the Golden Elixir (*jindan dadao* 金丹大道).
> All [you] saints and worthies of the world listen carefully to [this teaching].
> Those who first enter the way and inquire about the cultivation practice [will easily] go astray and lose their way.
> You must ask an enlightened teacher and seek the method of coming down (*xialuo*)[97] to [be able to] proceed on the path and follow the track.
> Since the founding teacher has transmitted one step of the Great Method of Non-Action (*Wuwei dafa*),
> The gate of heaven is open and the door of the earth is shut.[98] [You must] nourish the vital force (*qi*) and preserve the spirit (*shen* 神).
> Gathering water and fire [you must] refine *yin* and *yang* and invert *qian* 乾 and *kun* 坤.
> When the dragon and tiger join, *kan* 坎 and *li* 離 unite and the process of becoming and decaying[99] stops.
> Lead is *yang* and gold is *yin*, [they will produce] the [male] baby and the beautiful girl (*ying'er chanü* 嬰兒姹女).
> Spirit (*shen*) is the inner nature (*xing* 性) and vital force (*qi*) is physical life (*ming* 命). Inner nature and physical life [must be] cultivated together.

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[94] *Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 16, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 301.

[95] *Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 15, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 283.

[96] Cf. *Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 5 (*BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 94–98), partly translated by Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, p. 150.

[97] The expression *xialuo* occurs several times in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan*. Cf. above note 38.

[98] *Di* 地, literally "earth". It here may be understood as signifying the mundane world as opposed to the celestial world, or possibly even the hell (*diyu* 地獄). In this interpretation, the teaching opens the way to heaven and avoids entering hell. There is, however, also another layer of meaning in the context of *neidan* practices.

[99] *Si xiang* 四相, a Buddhist term referring to the four states of all phenomena (becoming, being, changing, decaying).

> Moving up to the *Niwan* palace,[100] the door on the top will be filled.
> Moving down to the hole of the gushing spring (*yongquan*),[101] there each will know and hear.
> When the fire of the heart descends and the water of the kidneys ascends, [you will be] majestic and unmoved (*weiwei budong*)[102] […]
>
> If body and mind are empty without anything, the Golden Elixir will appear.
> Spontaneously light will gleam and penetrate the body splendidly.
> Practising hard skill you only need to wait until the skill is perfected and the practice completed.
> You wait until the time comes to cast off your mundane body, and your holy nature returns to True Reality (*zhen* 真).[103]

This passage appears enigmatic on first reading because it is full of technical terms used in Daoist *neidan* practice.[104] Without going into details, we can see that it is a practice advocating the joint cultivation of the inner nature and the physical nature. It includes the circulation and uniting of essences within the body, such as the essence of the heart (fire) and of the kidneys (water). Such practices obviously stand in the tradition of Daoist inner alchemy. The *Zhong miao pian* 眾妙篇 (*Script on Marvellous Things*), which is contained in the *Daoshu* 道樞 (*Pivot of the Dao*), an encyclopedia of Daoist cultivation practices of the Song dynasty, describes similar practices in more detail. Some sentences of the *Jiulian jing* repeat almost verbatim formulations found there.[105]

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[100] *Niwan gong* 泥丸宮. In *neidan* terminology it denotes a point at the top of the head. Instead of 行道 I read 行到, which is parallel to the next phrase.

[101] Reading 湧泉 instead of 勇泉. In *neidan* terminology *Yongquan* denotes an aperture at the sole of the foot.

[102] The expression *weiwei budong* 巍巍不動 appears in the title of one of Patriarch Luo's scriptures, the *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan*.

[103] *Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 21, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 387–391. Some phrases have been translated using the variants of an undated Republican edition of the same text. A photocopy of this edition was kindly provided by Ma Xisha.

[104] Many of these terms can be found in Hu Fuchen, ed., *Zhonghua Daojiao da cidian*. Among the more technical expressions are Water and Fire (*shui huo* 水火, p. 1296), Turning Heaven and Earth Upside Down (*tian di diandao* 天地顛倒, p. 1262), Dragon and Tiger (*long hu* 龍虎, p. 1210), *kan li* (pp. 1152 f), *niwan gong* (p. 1177), *yongquan* (p. 1355), Gate of Heaven and Door of the Earth (*tian men di hu* 天門地戶, p. 781).

[105] *Daoshu* 道樞 (DZTY 1008), *j.* 35. There we read: "The fire of the heart descends and the water of the kidneys ascends" (*WWDZ*, vol. 20, p. 796c, lines 17–18) and "Open the gate of heaven and shut the door of the earth" (p. 801c, line 3). We

There cannot be any doubt, therefore, that the *Jiulian baojuan* was directly influenced by the Daoist *neidan* tradition.

We must conclude that the teachings of the *Jiulian baojuan* comprise at least two rather different aspects. On the one hand are the mythological images of deities and buddhas who come down to rescue mankind from impending catastrophes. Here salvation is described as returning to the native place to join the Venerable Mother in the Cloud City. This is the more exoteric part of the message. On the other hand there is an esoteric teaching of *neidan* practices offering a method for cultivating physical life and inner nature. It is this cultivation method that will accomplish the original nature to transcend the mundane limitations and return to the original state of completeness. In this esoteric context all the buddhas and deities are mere designations without any reality outside one's own mind and body. It seems that this message is also contained in coded form in the mythological narratives, where names and symbols are used interchangeably and no attempt is made to give the mythological figures a clear identity.

Since the methods taught for returning to the original nature are so clearly committed to the inner cultivation of *neidan* Daoism, we may ask why the book gives that much space to the mythological descriptions. The answer is probably to be found in the addressees of the book. Despite all the influences of Daoism, the *Jiulian baojuan* does not address the same clientele as do the scriptures of official Daoism. It is a book of propagation not of erudition. And it attempts to propagate its teachings among the general populace, not among monks, priests or scholars. Therefore it does not introduce its teachings against the background of the literary traditions but in view of the beliefs and expectations of common people. It explicitly states that it offers a way to salvation that is not open to monks and nuns, but only to laypersons who live with a family.[106] To meet the religious understanding of common people it was necessary to use symbols that were familiar to them. Deities and buddhas were such symbols, because they were part of common religious beliefs. To talk of Amitābha and Maitreya or the Mother and Guanyin was a language that could be understood by anyone. Only on a more subtle level was it communicated that basically all the buddhas are the same and there is even no difference between the buddhas and one's

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also find a reference to the male baby and the beautiful girl (*ying'er chanü*) (p. 803a, lines 15 ff).

[106] *Jiulian baojuan,* introduction, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 10.

own nature. In the same way, the idea of salvation was introduced in mythological images as rescue from impending catastrophes. Beliefs in coming disasters were part of the popular lore, and their concreteness made the idea of deliverance easy to understand. Accordingly, salvation was described in concrete terms as returning to the native place in heaven. It was not difficult to understand this, given the popularity of beliefs in the Pure Land of Amitābha. But again, these popular symbols could be discarded when a deeper understanding of the human condition was reached. Then, deliverance was not conceived as escape from the three disasters and eight difficulties,[107] but as reaching the state of completeness through the cultivation of one's original nature.

The message of the *Jiulian baojuan*, and the same applies to many other *baojuan*, is more complex than it seems to be if we only regard its mythological narratives and use of popular religious symbols. Of course, these symbolic images are fascinating because the *baojuan* are the first literary sources that give evidence of them. However, it appears that these mythological themes did not originate in the circles that produced the *baojuan* but rather were adopted by them to communicate their own religious messages. Applying Buddhist terminology, we could say that they were skilful means[108] used to propagate teachings whose deeper meaning was explained only during the process of cultivation within the sectarian community.

We do not know how the teaching of this and other books was understood by individual sect members or other readers. It is not to be expected that religious movements, which sometimes grew to thousands of members, were able to turn them all into searchers for their inner nature. The concrete mythological images that attracted many of them had their own dynamics since they responded to prevailing fears and expectations. Thus, books such as the *Jiulian baojuan* contributed to the further spreading of these mythological themes, even if this may not have been their primary intent. In the early years of the seventeenth

[107] There is a phrase that seems to indicate that the impending disasters are just threatening the unenlightened mind. "How can one attain [the state of] not [belonging to the world of the] unstable? If one understands Heaven, heaven will not shatter; if one understands Earth, the earth will no perish. If one understands man, man will reach the *dao*. If one understands disasters, disasters will not appear" (*Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 11, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 201). However, this is part of a question addressed to the teacher.

[108] On the significance of this concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism see Pye, *Skilful means*.

century, about a century after the *Jiulian baojuan* was first printed, there was an attempted rebellion in Jiangsu led by the sect leader Liu Tianxu 劉天緒. Liu called himself Master of the *Wuwei* (Non-Action) Teaching (*wuwei jiaozhu* 無為教主) and preached a message of impending catastrophes which could only be avoided by those who follow his teaching. He attracted a substantial following, including almost thousand government soldiers. In 1606 he planned a rebellion, which was however revealed to the authorities. Liu Tianxu was tortured to death in early 1607.[109] The case is instructive for our present context because it shows the interaction of popular lore and sectarian writings. When Liu started his rebellion he declared that "King Li will appear" (*Li wang chushi* 李王出世),[110] which is an obvious reference to the popular expectation of a saviour surnamed Li that had been transmitted down the ages since antiquity. However, Liu Tianxu did not only rely on oral lore. He used a book with the title *Huangji shouyuan*† *baojuan* 皇極收元寶卷 (Precious Scroll about Returning to the Origin in the [Period of the] August Ultimate).[111] This was either the *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, which was also known as *Shouyuan baojuan*, or the *Jiulian baojuan*, whose alternative name was *Huangji juan*.[112] Even the scarce information we have about the Liu Tianxu incident shows that he had adopted symbols used in these scriptures. *Wuwei jiaozhu* is just a variant of *Wuwei zu*, who in the *Jiulian baojuan* is identified among others with Maitreya. But Liu Tianxu also declared himself to be a manifestation of the *Huangji fo* 皇極佛 (Buddha of the August Ultimate).[113] Both the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* and the *Jiulian baojuan* use the expression *huangji* to refer to the age ruled by Maitreya. The case of Li Tianxu shows that such scriptures and their mythological symbols reverberated on the existing eschatological and millenarian traditions and reinforced them. They offered a vast reservoir of symbols, which could be used and interpreted in different contexts, and the context of millenarian expectations was one of them.

Since Liu Tianxu called himself Master of the *Wuwei* Teaching, some scholars have wondered whether his sect was related to the

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[109] The case of Li Tianxu is described by Shek, *Religion and society in late Ming*, pp. 245–248. See also Overmyer, "Boatmen and buddhas," pp. 290 f.

[110] Shek, *Religion and society in late Ming*, p. 247.

[111] Yu Songqing, *Ming Qing Bailianjiao yanjiu*, p. 10.

[112] Cf. Lian Lichang, "«Jiulian jing» kao," p. 114.

[113] Yu Songqing, *Ming Qing Bailian jiao yanjiu*, p. 10.

Wuwei movement of Patriarch Luo. Of course, we cannot exclude this possibility altogether; but the name *Wuwei jiao* is certainly not sufficient to establish such a relationship. The term *wuwei* (non-action) appears already in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* as an attribute to the name of the teaching,[114] and the *Jiulian baojuan* refers to its teaching as Great Method of Non-Action (*Wuwei dafa*). Thus, there is no need to assume a dependency of Liu Tianxu from the Luo movement. A more intriguing question is of course whether the circles that produced the *Jiulian baojuan* and Patriarch Luo's sect were in some way related to each other. The two movements were roughly contemporary, as the second edition of the *Jiulian baojuan* was printed in 1523, four years before Patriarch Luo's death. Luo Menghong started to propagate his teachings in 1482, so the author of the *Jiulian baojuan* may well have been familiar with them. There is one reference to a *Wubu jing* 五部經 (*Scripture in Five Books)*,[115] which recalls Luo's *Wubu liuce*, but this does not permit any conclusions. Nor does the common use of some key terms, such as *wuwei*, need to be explained by mutual influence. While both teachings approach basically the same problem of salvation through insight into the unity of one's own nature with the Absolute, they do so from very different backgrounds. The *Jiulian baojuan* clearly is indebted to the Daoist *neidan* tradition, while Luo Menghong's approach starts from Buddhism. They nevertheless show some similarities, which is, however, not surprising since both movements flourished in comparable cultural milieus and drew from a common stock of religious traditions.

Much more than Patriarch Luo's writings, the *Huangji jindan baojuan* and the *Jiulian baojuan* testify the early existence of popular religious traditions similar to the teachings of the sects founded in the sixteenth century. The fact that these scriptures were preserved shows that they were cherished by later sects and incorporated into the growing corpus of popular religious literature. The *Jiulian jing* in particular became the basic scripture in many sects. We may regard these early examples of *baojuan* as literary condensations of ideas and beliefs that were part of the popular culture. The casting of these beliefs into *baojuan* marks a significant step in a development by which diffused ideas and notions that permeated popular culture condensed to distinct traditions with

[114] The teaching is called "Great Way for Attaining Completion, Holy *Wuwei*" (*Shouyuan dadao sheng wuwei* 收圓大道聖無為). *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* ch. 4, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, p. 277.

[115] *Jiulian baojuan,* ch. 21, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 409.

their own literary heritage. A further step in this development was reached when the social milieus in which these traditions prevailed left anonymity and emerged as sectarian groups that acted publicly. To be sure, sectarian groups existed before, and the early *baojuan* were certainly transmitted within sectarian structures; it was, however, not before the turn to the sixteenth century that popular religious movements surfaced which felt sufficient social support to engage in large scale proselytizing. In the sixteenth century, the social and cultural climate allowed new religious movements to overstep the boundaries of locally and socially marginalized cults and to develop into extended networks that reached even the higher classes of the capital city. Luo Menghong was the first founder of a new religious movement who presented his own writings publicly and had them printed. Although his movement stood outside the state approved forms of Buddhism, it was not restricted to the socially marginalized and there was no need to hide its activities. Thus, the social climate was more favourable to popular religious movements than during the first half of the Ming dynasty. The reasons for this favourable climate deserve further study and cannot be discussed here. Suffice it to note that the emperors and their surroundings usually supported religious beliefs and practices, which brought about a general increase of religious activities. In the decades after Patriarch Luo's death a number of other religious teachers followed his example and became founders of new religious movements that gained considerable social support. Only at the end of the century did the attitude of the authorities change and voices were heard that called for the restriction and suppression of these religions.

In the following I shall deal with some of the better-known religious movements founded in late Ming that had lasting influence on the sectarian movements of the Qing dynasty. They all stand for the development of diffused popular religious beliefs into distinct religions with literary traditions and enduring social organizations.

2. Huangtian Jiao (Yellow Heaven Teaching)

One of these new religious movements was the *Huangtian jiao* 黃天教 (Teaching of the Yellow Heaven). In the first decades of the Qing dynasty the scholar Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704) complained:

> Before the eras Longqing [1567–1572] and Wanli [1573–1619], the customs in our Zhili province were pure and cultivated. However, at the end of the Wanli era came the Yellow Heaven Sect (*Huangtian dao* 黃天道) and until today spread widely in the capital and the towns of prefectures and counties, and even penetrated to the poorest villages and remote mountain areas.[116]

This account testifies the popularity of a sect founded more than hundred years before. The *Huangtian jiao* continued through the Qing dynasty and was found still existing in north China in the middle of the twentieth century.[117] It produced a considerable number of *baojuan*, the most important of which is the *Puming rulai wuwei liaoyi baojuan* 普明如來無為了義寶卷 (*Precious Scroll of the Puming about the Understanding of Non-Action*, short: *Puming baojuan*). This scripture, of which a printed edition of 1599 exists,[118] goes back to Puming 普明.

Puming is the religious name of Li Bin 李賓 who lived in the first half of the sixteenth century.[119] He was born in Zhili, Huai'an 懷安 county (present-day western Hebei province). The date of his birth is unknown. In his youth he worked as a peasant, but later he became a soldier in the defence troops at the Great Wall. He lost an eye in fighting and was therefore later called the Tiger-Eyed Chan Master (*huyan chanshi* 虎眼禪師). It was during his time as soldier or shortly after he had left the army that he started his career as a religious seeker who for some ten years visited various teachers and engaged in religious cultivation. Finally, in 1553, he found an enlightened master who taught him the method of opening the Mysterious Pass (*xuanguan*) and other practices of meditation. He thus reached enlightenment and became a religious teacher himself. Probably in 1558 he presented his own teaching in the *Puming rulai wuwei liaoyi baojuan*. He died in 1562.[120]

The early history of the tradition founded by Li Bin is not completely clear, for there are some contradictions in the sources. The *Longhua jing*, which in the first years of the Qing dynasty mentions the *Huangtian jiao* in its list of sectarian traditions, does not refer to Puming as its

[116] *Cun ren bian* 存人編, by Yan Yuan 顏元, *j.* 2, in *Si cun bian* 四存編, Beijing: Guji chubanshe, 1957, p. 152.

[117] Cf. Li Shiyu 李世瑜, *Xianzai Huabei mimi zongjiao* 現在華北秘密宗教, Taibei: Guting shushi, 1975 (Original publication: Chengdu 1948), pp. 10–31.

[118] Reprinted in *BJCJ*, vol. 4.

[119] For a discussion of the identity of Puming (with sources and further references) see Shek, *Religion and society in late Ming*, pp. 252–262; Ma/Han, pp. 408–416.

[120] Cf. Ma/Han, p. 414 f.

founder but to Pujing 普靜, who was a member of Puming's sect.[121] Biographical information about Pujing is given in the *Pujing rulai yaoshi baojuan* 普靜如來鑰匙寶卷 (Precious Scroll of the Tathāgata Pujing about the Key [to Salvation], short: *Pujing baojuan*), which was probably edited by one of his disciples.[122] From this we can deduct that he was a man surnamed Zheng 鄭, who was a direct disciple of Puming's and in 1578 started to propagate the teaching of this scripture. He died nine years later in 1586.[123] Pujing was recognized as sect leader by some of the members of Puming's community, and it was this branch that the *Longhua jing* refers to as the *Huangtian jiao* founded by Pujing. However, there was still another branch whose leadership was transmitted within Li Bin's family. Pujing became sect leader only in 1578, sixteen years after Puming's death. According to the same scripture Puming's teaching was first continued by Puguang 普光, who died in 1576.[124] Puguang was Puming's wife, née Wang 王.[125] They had two daughters with the religious names Pujing* 普淨 and Puzhao 普照, and Puzhao had a daughter called Puxian 普賢.[126] Puxian or one of her disciples apparently edited and reworked the 1599 edition of the *Puming baojuan* where Puxian is presented as the reincarnation of Puming.[127] This was probably an attempt to establish herself as Puming's successor and leader of the movement and to legitimate her position against the claims of competing sect leaders. It thus appears that after Li Bin (i.e., Puming) his community was first headed by his wife Puguang, but after her death in 1576 split into two branches. One of them was headed by their two daughters Pujing* and Puzhao, who were followed

[121] *Longhua jing,* ch. 23, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 736b. The text has Huangjing 黃靜 instead of Pujing, which is obviously a mistake of the copyist, since the first character of the *dharma* name in the *Huangtian jiao* was always *pu*. The *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan* 銷釋木人開山寶卷, which belongs to the same tradition as the *Longhua jing*, correctly has Pujing (*MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 841a).

[122] Reprinted in *BJCJ,* vol. 5. The edition has two *juan,* no publication date is given, but it obviously is a late edition.

[123] Cf. Ma/Han, pp. 425–428.

[124] *Pujing rulai yaoshi baojuan,* ch. 7, in *BJCJ,* vol. 5, p. 69. Note that nothing is said about the time between 1562 and 1569.

[125] This is testified by an eight generation descendant of Puming's who was interrogated by officials in 1763. The confession is quoted in Ma, *Minjian zongjiao zhi,* pp. 245 f.

[126] Cf. Ma/Han, pp. 417–419, quoting confessions of descendants.

[127] *Puming rulai wuwei liaoyi baojuan,* ch. 10, in *BJCJ,* vol. 4, p. 441. Puming is here called the Non-Action Patriarch (*Wuwei zu* 無為祖).

by Puzhao's daughter Puxian. Leader of the other branch was Pujing, a disciple of Li Bin's. We meet here an already familiar pattern of development after a founder's death: There is a strong tendency to transmit leadership within the family line, while at the same time senior disciples tend to establish their own community of followers and become founders of new lines of transmission.

Both branches were continued well into the Qing dynasty. As has been mentioned, Pujing's branch was taken in the *Longhua jing* as representing the *Huangtian jiao*, and there are further scriptures of the seventeenth century that confirm the same view.[128] The nineteenth century *Zhongxi zuyan baojuan* 眾喜粗言寶卷 (*Precious Scroll with the Coarse Sayings of Zhongxi*, short: *Zhongxi baojuan*) still lists Pujing in a line of patriarchs as successor to Puming and Puguang.[129] The other branch, which was headed by Li Bin's descendants, became known to the authorities in the eighteenth century when in 1763 the government launched a campaign against popular religious movements. In Wanquan 萬全 (present-day western Hebei province) they arrested a certain Li Xia'nian 李遐年, who declared that his ancestor in the sixth generation had been an elder brother of Li Bin, alias Puming, the founder of the *Huangtian jiao*. The scriptures of this sect were transmitted within his family, which apparently gained some fortune, for Li Xia'nian's grandfather Li Wei 李蔚 was a *gongsheng* 貢生 (tribute student).[130] The authorities detected in the Bitiansi 碧天寺 temple a pagoda in honour of Puming and his wife Puguang where also their graves were found. The emperor took the persecution of this sect very seriously: Li Bin's descendants were executed or banished to distant regions and the Bitiansi temple was razed to the ground. Even the dead leaders were not spared. The bones of Puming and Puguang were exhumed and publicly shattered into small pieces. Besides the main pagoda, also the three pagodas dedicated to their two daughters Pujing* and Puzhao and to their granddaughter Puxian were destroyed and their bodily remains smashed. The same disgraceful treatment was given to the bones of Li Wei.[131]

[128] Cf. *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan*, introduction, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 841a; *Xiaoshi jiexu lianzong baojuan* 銷釋接續蓮宗寶卷, ch. 24, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 582.

[129] *Zhongxi zuyan baojuan*, *j.* 3, in *BJCJ*, vol. 21, pp. 128 f, upper text, *j.* 5 (pp. 385 f, main text). This line is continued with Wang Changsheng 汪長生, alias Pushan 普善.

[130] Li Wei is the author of the preface to the *Huyan chanshi yiliu changjing juan* 虎眼禪師遺留唱經卷 (*Scroll on the chants and scriptures left by the Tiger-Eyed Chan Master*) dated 1692, cf. Sawada Mizuho, *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū*, p. 349.

[131] See Ma/Han, pp. 419–422 for quotations from official reports.

These most radical measures of the authorities show that the activities of the *Huangtian jiao* were considered an earnest threat by the government. In this way the leadership of the Li family, which had lasted for more than two centuries, was brutally terminated. However, the Chinese state did not succeed in exterminating the *Huangtian* tradition. The remaining followers reorganized, and official reports mention *Huangtian* activities in the following decades. In Wanquan county the cult of Puming surfaced in 1875, when during a drought the peasants prayed at Puming's repaired grave for rain. Since their prayers were answered they built a temple, which was called Pumingsi 普明寺.[132] And as late as 1948, Li Shiyu found in many villages of this county temples of the *Huangtian jiao*.[133] Even the most brutal measures of the Qing government were not able to eradicate this religious tradition, which finally survived the dynasty.

Interpretation of early scriptures

In the course of its history the *Huangtian jiao* produced a considerable number of *baojuan*. The teachings they present are heterogeneous. On the surface, Buddhist influence is obvious, buddhas and bodhisattvas are frequently mentioned, and Puming and other leaders are even given the title *Tathāgata* (*rulai* 如來). The opening section of the *Puming baojuan* may illustrate the ample use of Buddhist symbols:

> The Buddha said: The *tathāgata* Puming is full of compassion and concern about the myriad living beings who cannot overcome hardship and subdue evil in the world of Jambudvīpa. Everywhere there are heterodox schools and sects that falsely claim to lead to the *dao* and present useless scriptures. Each of them has its three vehicles. They do not know the original true nature of the Ancient Buddha (*gufo* 古佛), but practise according to outward appearances, which will draw them into the sea of suffering without way of returning to the origin. However restless they are, all those who live in the last five-hundred years of the end of the *dharma* (*mofa*) will hardly escape their bad karma. But those who are destined will meet the Sacred Way of the Yellow Heaven (*Huangtian shengdao* 黃天聖道), and they will receive [the mantra in] four sentences. […] The Ancient Buddha will transmit to them the true mantra which is printed into the mind.[134]

[132] *Wanquan xianzhi* 萬全縣志 (1933), *j.* 7, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 424.

[133] Cf. Li Shiyu, *Xianzai Hebei mimi zongjiao*, pp. 10–31.

[134] *Puming rulai wuwei liaoyi baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 4, pp. 378 f.

The passage is presented as a saying of the Buddha and uses Buddhist notions, such as the world of Jambudvīpa, *tathāgata*, *karma*, and *mofa*. But it is not the *buddhadharma* that brings salvation but the teaching of Puming, who is called the "Ancient Buddha". About this teaching the text states a few lines later:

> The *tathāgata* Puming offers the understanding of Non-Action (*wuwei*). Puxian's teaching of the Great Way of Complete Perfection (*quanzhen dadao* 全真大道) has never been heard by the thousand saints, and the ten thousand patriarchs do not explain it. Now you meet the Ancient Buddha who out of compassion has shown the Great Way of Heavenly Truth (*tianzhen dadao* 天真大道)[135] and opened another door to escape suffering, the path that leads to the sacred and returns to the origin.[136]

The connotations here are not Buddhist but refer to Daoist and popular traditions. Puming reveals the true understanding of *wuwei*, which since Laozi is a central notion in Daoism, but in this context may be an allusion to Patriarch Luo's teaching. The text uses the high esteem that the *wuwei* teaching probably had in certain milieus for its own purposes, but does not mention Patriarch Luo.[137] It is only through Puming that an understanding of the *wuwei* teaching can be reached. This message is so important that it is summarized in the title of the scripture. Accordingly, Puming is called the "*Wuwei* Patriarch" (*wuwei zu* 無為祖) who "descended to the central region [i.e., China] to reveal the true scripture and save all men."[138] However, the scripture gives Puxian a position equal to Puming. She is his reincarnation and it is she who teaches the way of Complete Perfection (*Quanzhen*) that offers the only path to salvation. *Quanzhen* is of course an allusion to the Daoist school of Complete Perfection. But the Great Way of Complete Perfection taught by Puxian has never been revealed before, it is a new way to salvation.

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[135] *Tianzhen* could also be translated as "Heavenly Perfection" in analogy to *quanzhen* ("Complete Perfection").

[136] *Puming rulai wuwei liaoyi baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 4, p. 380.—The scripture is hereafter quoted as *Puming baojuan*.

[137] Given the popularity of the term *wuwei* in other sectarian traditions, such as the *Jiulian jing*, it must remain open whether it here refers to Patriarch Luo's teachings. The text (*BJCJ*, vol. 4, 576) mentions however a *Wuwei jushi* 無為居士 (lay Buddhist *Wuwei*), a name usually referring to Luo Menghong.

[138] *Puming baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 4, p. 441.

The scripture makes it clear that its teaching is not just a variant of Buddhism or Daoism, but superior to them:

> Out of the ninety-six hundred million (*yi* 億) men the buddha of the past has rescued two hundred million, who are Daoist men and women; the buddha of the present has rescued two hundred million, who are Buddhist monks and nuns. Ninety-two hundred million are left. The Ancient Buddha of the August Ultimate (*Huangji Gufo* 皇極古佛) originally is a transformation of the saints. The Great Way of Complete Perfection is the way for bodhisattvas at home (*zaijia pusa* 在家菩薩) to awake to the *dao*. […] The Buddha uttered the true saying (*zhenyan* 真言):
>
> The wisdom of the bodhisattvas at home is rare,
> They perform their rituals (*daochang* 道場) in the midst of noisy marketplaces.
> They all rely on Puxian's Way of Complete Perfection,
> The great and the male, the small and the female will all advance to the land of immortals.[139]

The "bodhisattvas at home" are the followers of Puxian's teaching. The Ancient Buddha of the August Ultimate refers to Puming, who is here presented as the saviour and ruler of the coming cosmic period. Elsewhere he is described as the "father of all beings in this world," while Puxian is the "mother of all buddhas". Thus, Puming and Puxian are both manifestations of cosmic forces, which have taken human form to reveal a way to salvation that surpasses the teachings of Buddhism and Daoism and of the countless other "heterodox" schools of their time.

The success of any new religious movements depends to a certain degree on its ability to present itself as different from and superior to competing movements. On the other hand, however, the teachings have to respond to the expectations and preexisting beliefs of their audience. While the former condition demands laying stress on difference, the latter requires to rely on familiar and generally believed ideas. One way to mark the difference was to exalt the position of the respective teacher and to give him or her an unique position within the religious scheme. This is what the *Puming baojuan* did, when it declared Puming to be a manifestation of the primordial Ancient Buddha of the August Ultimate who reveals the true meaning of the *wuwei* teaching, thus claiming to surpass Patriarch Luo. At the same time

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[139] *Puming baojuan, in BJCJ, vol.* 4, *p.* 590 f. The first two lines of the "true saying" are a verbatim quotation from the *Xiaoshi Jin'gang keyi* 銷釋金剛科儀, in *MJZJ*, vol. 1, p. 12a.

Puxian's eminence is stressed to mark the difference to competing branches of the same tradition. It is no surprise that we find a similar structure in the *Pujing baojuan,* with the difference that there Pujing, instead of Puxian, is said to be a transformation of Puming.[140] And this scripture explains Pujing's position in exactly the same words as does the *Puming baojuan* in the case of Puxian: "He opened another door to escape suffering and hell."[141] Pujing likewise is the manifestation of a cosmic principle, which here is called the *Yaoshi Gufo* 鑰匙古佛 (lit. "Ancient Key-Buddha", that is, the saviour who offers the key to the door to heaven). The Key-Buddha manifested himself numerous times in history, and his last manifestation is Pujing who came to rescue the remaining ninety-two hundred million through his scripture and to open the door to heaven.[142] Here, the Ancient Key-Buddha (*Yaoshi Gufo*) has the same function as the Ancient Buddha of the August Ultimate (*Huangji Gufo*) has in the *Puming baojuan.*

Thus, difference is marked on two levels: the symbolic and the social. Socially, competing traditions can be identified as congregations that revere different persons—usually their leader or the alleged founder of the tradition—as the messenger who reveals the true teaching. Symbolically, the distinction can be marked by using different names to symbolize the key concepts of the respective teaching. These differences, the social and the symbolic, are important to trace historical connections between sectarian groups. However, in many cases they conceal structural similarities of belief systems. This is possibly not only true for competing groups that are obviously historically related, but may also apply to many others that seem to belong to different traditions.

In the same way that symbols may be used to mark differences, they can also function to suggest familiarity. As an example we may consider such names as Amitābha or Maitreya. Amitābha is mentioned in many sectarian writings, including those of the *Huangtian jiao*. This name certainly sounded familiar to most believers, but the meaning of this symbol is completely different from the one it usually had in Pure Land teachings. The *Pujing baojuan* states:

[140] *Pujing rulai yaoshi baojuan,* ch. 10 (*BJCJ,* vol. 5, 80).—The scripture is hereafter quoted as *Pujing baojuan.*

[141] *Pujing baojuan,* ch. 25, in *BJCJ,* vol. 5, p. 137. Compare the same wording in *Puming baojuan* (*BJCJ,* vol. 4, p. 380), where "hell" is lacking. Translation see above p. 298.

[142] *Pujing baojuan,* ch. 21, in *BJCJ,* vol. 5, pp. 123 f. The passage gives additional biographical data about Pujing.

> The ancient Amitābha (*gu Mituo* 古彌陀) has many transformations. His eighty-second transformation was the Buddha *Laojun* (*Laojun fo* 老君佛).[143] [Then came] the patriarch Puming who transmitted the Great Way, and Puguang after whom he appeared through transformation in Pujing.[144]

Here, Amitābha is structurally the same as the Ancient Key-Buddha, who manifests himself in human form, including Pujing.[145] Although Amitābha does not figure prominently in the scripture, we observe that symbols are to a certain degree interchangeable. While the symbol of the Ancient Key-Buddha is a distinctive element of the teaching presented, the symbol Amitābha hides the distinction and suggests closeness to generally accepted beliefs. But the meaning of this familiar symbol is newly defined in the context of the scripture. The same applies to other cases. Reverence paid to Confucius or the "Buddha *Laojun*" does not mean that Confucian or Daoist ideas are shared. Also Maitreya is such a case. Some scholars are inclined to interpret occurrence of Maitreya in sectarian writings as an indication of millenarian beliefs in the descent of Maitreya. This may often be true, but to know this we have to analyse the use of this symbol more closely. Thus, in the *Pujing baojuan* Maitreya is mentioned as the buddha who rules the third cosmic period, but it is not he but the Key-Buddha, or Pujing, who is the expected saviour and reveals the way to salvation.[146] Maitreya's role is purely conventional to parallel the function of Dīpaṃkara and Śākyamuni as lords of the three cosmic periods. In the *Puming baojuan* he is even missing in the same context, where only the Ancient Buddha of the August Ultimate occurs as the saviour who rescues the ninety-two hundred million.[147] The name Maitreya is not considered important in this context and nothing is said about his coming and ruling the empirical world.

To understand the symbolic language of sectarian texts is difficult not only because the same symbol has different meanings in different contexts and the same meaning can be expressed through different

[143] In the *Puming baojuan*, *Laojun* is the eighty-first manifestation of the *Huangji Gufo* (*BJCJ*, vol. 4, pp. 592, 594).

[144] *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 10, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 80.

[145] A similar role is given to Amitābha in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, where he is also said to have manifested himself several times (*BJCJ*, vol. 10, pp. 269).

[146] *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 18, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 109 f.

[147] *Puming baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 4, p. 590. Note that Maitreya is missing, while Dīpaṃkara and Śakyamuni are mentioned before. The Ancient Buddha of the August Ultimate usually refers to Maitreya but here is identified with Puming (p. 581).

symbols, but also because the text himself may have various layers of meaning. It depends on the reader or listener which meaning is understood. For some members of a religious community the names of deities could evoke quite traditional ideas of divine beings, while for others they possibly symbolized impersonal principles. As we have seen in the writings of Patriarch Luo, "returning to the native place" can be a metaphor for attaining enlightenment, but it could also be understood literally as entering a transcendent world. Needless to say that the same is true for such symbols as "heaven" or "hell". Having said this, we can now turn to the Unborn Venerable Mother (*Wusheng Laomu*), a symbol that figures so prominently in many popular religious scriptures and also occurs in the texts of the *Huangtian jiao*. What does it mean there? On a first level it may be understood as a compassionate deity sorrowfully watching her children who are immersed in the sea of suffering. Out of compassion she wants to rescue and deliver them to their native place in heaven. This role is very similar to that of Amitābha, and "returning to the native place" in this context has the same meaning as attaining the Pure Land:

> The Unborn Mother is craving for her children, who love wealth and sexual pleasure and, full of desire for this world of dust, have inane thoughts.[148]

> The Unborn Holy Mother rescues her children, they all return to the native place.[149]

Such language evokes the idea of a personal deity who resides in a transcendent realm to receive her children. In other contexts, however, the symbol of the Mother acquired different connotations. The *Pujing baojuan* uses it in the description of the primordial state of the cosmos.

> To talk about the origin of the *qi* of Before-Heaven (*xiantian*): Before-Heaven is the mind of Limitless (*wuji xin*). [It exists] since eternity. While it is not produced, it has the ability to produce all things. This is called Before-Heaven. It just is the Mother of no-birth[-and-death] (*wusheng zhi mu* 無生之母).[150]

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[148] *Puming baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 4., p. 395.

[149] *Puming baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 4, pp. 525 f.

[150] *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 25, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, pp. 136 f.

Wusheng zhi mu, which is here translated as "the mother of no-birth-and-death"[151] can of course also be interpreted as "Unborn Mother", and this double meaning was without doubt in the mind of any reader. In any case, it is clear that the symbol of the Mother here refers to a cosmic principle, which resembles the *dao* of *Laozi* more than a personal deity. However, in Daoism the *dao* was also symbolized as a personal deity, such as *Yuanshi Tianzun* 元始天尊 (Celestial Venerable of Primordial Beginning), and it is exactly this symbol which is identified with the Mother: "The Celestial Venerable of Primordial Beginning is the Mother of no-birth[-and-death] (*wusheng zhi mu*)."[152]

In a cosmological context the Mother appears as what existed before heaven and earth. It is the source of all being, which produces everything, but is not produced. In Western religious traditions it would be called God. The Mother acts in history through agents:

> It is not so that the Limitless (*wuji*) is changeable [i.e., it is immutable].[153] The Unborn Venerable Mother[154] (*Wusheng Laomu*) has produced Lord Lao (*Laojun*), east and west and north and south, and has divided light and darkness. She has established the sun and the moon and fixed heaven and earth. The eight trigrams of the nine palaces revolve in an endless cycle, the three apexes revolve and establish humankind. The Limitless has established the Gathering of the Green Yang (*qingyang hui*), and through transformation made appear an administer of the teaching, who is Dīpaṃkara. The Limitless has established the Gathering of the Red Yang (*hongyang hui*), and through revolving transformation appeared Śākyamuni as minister of the teaching. The Limitless has established the Gathering of the White

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[151] In Mahāyāna Buddhism *wusheng* is a technical term referring to absolute reality, which is without birth and death. It is contrasted to the illusion of the *saṃsāra* as seen by the unenlightened. The *Da fangguang yuanjue xiuduoluo liaoyi jing* 大方廣圓覺修多羅了義經 (T 842), in *Taishō*, vol. 17, p. 913c, lines 2–3, states: "All living beings are within the realm of *wusheng*. They are falsely regarded as [being submitted to] becoming and decaying, which is therefore called the wheel of birth and death." This reflects the Mahāyāna teaching that negates the distinction between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*.

[152] *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 27, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 144. Compare ch. 23 (p. 128) where we read "The Celestial Venerable of Primordial Beginning has established the world, he is the Mother of Limitless." Thus, *Limitless* (*wuji*) and *Not-Produced* or *Unborn* (*wusheng*) are structurally equivalent.

[153] The statement is strange, since the same text states two pages earlier (*BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 128): "*Yuanshi Tianzun* has established the world, he is the Mother of *Wuji*. *Wuji* transforms (*zhuanhua* 轉化) ..." There is possibly a semantic difference between *bianhua* 變化 (as in *neng bianhua* "changeable") and *zhuanhua* (lit. "revolve and transform").

[154] For conventional reasons I use this common translation of *Wusheng Laomu*. It could, of course, also be translated as "Venerable Mother of [the realm of] No Birth".

> Yang (*baiyang hui*), which for eighty-one *kalpas* [will be administered] by the Venerable Maitreya.[155]

In these contexts *Wusheng Laomu* is identified with *Wuji*, Limitless. It is a symbol that stands for the Absolute, which alone is unchangeable and without cause. Anything that exists has its origin in it. Even the buddhas are just appearances caused by the transformation of the eight trigrams, and thus produced by Mother/Limitless. Thus, Mother is the personalized symbol for the creative principle whose impersonal equivalent is *Wuji*. It is the origin of all that exists in the world of ongoing transformations. In this sense, returning to the origin is the same as returning to the Mother. Salvation can thus be described as union with the Mother:

> When I rose, tears were dropping from my two cheeks. The Three Passes (*san guan* 三關) were hit through and the one aperture (*qiao* 竅) was opened.[156] I suddenly saw that I had attained the Unborn Venerable Mother (*Wusheng Laomu*). I rushed to be embraced in the mother's bosom. Son and mother wept and cried. Ever since our separation at the Numinous Mountain (*lingshan*) I was bound to the wheel of rebirth and could not return home, because my mind was covetous and jealous. Only now, that I had received a family letter from the Venerable Mother, I have attained the priceless jewel. Mother, you hear and deliver the multitudes from the waves [of the sea of suffering]. Mother, hear me! The Supreme True Scripture is the unsurpassed.[157]

Here, the union with the Mother is described as a moving experience that has already taken place. Returning home to meet the Mother is nothing to be expected in another world, not even in a time to come, but it is an experience that can be made in this very life. This passage obviously describes a mystical experience. As the opening line states, this experience took place after the Three Passes were broken through and the aperture was opened. *San guan* (Three Passes) and *qiao* (aperture) are technical terms in *neidan* Daoism, and in this context the Mother acquires a still different meaning.

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[155] *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 23, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 130.

[156] For a similar formulation see *Puming baojuan*, ch. 23 (*BJCJ*, vol. 4, p. 509, line 1).

[157] *Puming baojuan*, ch. 11, in *BJCJ*, vol. 4, p. 447 f. Translations in Richard Shek, "Millenarianism without rebellion. The Huangtian Dao in North China," *Modern China*, 8 (1982), pp. 305–336: 320 and Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, p. 190. Both omit the opening line; without it the *neidan* context of the experience is lost.

The *Pujing baojuan* is very outspoken about *neidan* theories and practices. In chapter 27 the symbol of the Mother is explained:

> To talk about what exists since eternity: The Celestial Venerable of Primordial Beginning (*Yuanshi Tianzun*) is the Mother of no-birth[-and-death] (*wusheng zhi mu*), who makes gleam the essence of *yin* (*yinjing* 陰精). […] At the top of the head there is a heavenly *hun* spirit (*tian hun* 天魂) who guards the aperture of the Mysterious Pass (*xuanguan*), so that the spirit of *yin* (*yinshen* 陰神) does not go through and the buddha light cannot appear. In the heart there is an earthly *hun* spirit who guards the fire stoves of the cinnabar field (*dantian* 丹田), so that the fire blood (*huoxue* 火血) does not go through and the three hairs (*san mao* 三毛)[158] cannot appear. Life (*ming* 命) is the human *hun* spirit who guards the lower cinnabar field within the yellow court, so that the controlling vein (*dumai* 督脈) does not open. If the sun of the fields (*tianri* 田日) is below the bag, the true nature (*zhen xing* 真性) cannot come out and accordingly birth, old age, disease, and death occur. […] The human mind is the single *qi* of Primordial Beginning (*yuanshi yi qi* 元始一氣), the human will is the Celestial Venerable of the Numinous Treasure (*Lingbao Tianzun* 靈寶天尊), nature and life are the Way and its Virtue (*daode* 道德). These are the Three Jewels (*san bao* 三寶) within man. They can also be distinguished as *jing* 精, *qi* 氣, and *shen* 神. *Jing* transforms to become all immortals and masters, *shen* transforms to become all *bodhisattvas* and *qi* transforms to become all saints and monks. This cannot be completely explained.[159]

Without going into the details of *neidan* terminology, we can discern the background of the statement "the Three Passes were broken through and the aperture was opened." It refers to the microcosmic landscape of the body. A very concrete representation of this inner landscape is provided in an illustration entitled *Xiuzhen tu* 脩真圖 (Chart of the Cultivation of Perfection), which depicts the human body as an alchemical stove.[160] The passage quoted above explains that the Three Passes have to be opened to allow the free circulation of the cosmic forces *jing*, *qi*, and *shen*. Only when the aperture of the Mysterious Pass

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[158] The "tree hairs" (*san mao*) are also mentioned in the *Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 11 (*BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 209).—In Chinese medicine *san mao* is a technical term denoting hairs growing on the nail of the big toe (Zhongguo Daojiao xiehui, and Suzhou Daojiao xiehui, eds. 中國道教協會　蘇州道教協會, *Daojiao da cidian* 道教大辭典, Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1994 (1995), p. 78). Its meaning in *neidan* Daoism is not clear to me.

[159] *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 27, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 144 f.

[160] *Pujing baojuan*, appendix, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 187. See illustration on p. 307.

in the head is opened, can the *yin* force go through and complete understanding ("buddha light," *fo guang* 佛光) appear. Now, the *yin* force is identified with the Mother and Primordial Beginning. "The *qi* of Primordial Beginning is the *yin* Mother" is repeated a few lines later. But it is also said that the "human mind (*ren xin* 人心) is the *qi* of Primordial Beginning." Thus, the Mother is the human mind. Since the macrocosm of nature corresponds to the microcosm of man, the creative processes of nature have their correspondence in the creative power of man. *Jing, qi,* and *shen* engender all supernatural beings and forces. There is no need to search for the Three Jewels outside, for the Three Jewels are within man. Accordingly: "The saints and monks are within the human body."[161]

The symbol of the Mother thus reaches a new level of meaning. The Mother is Primordial Beginning, and Primordial Beginning is the human mind. Thus, union with the Mother must be sought within oneself. The mystical union may be experienced as an encounter with a personal deity, but it can only be attained through the practices of inner alchemy. The *Puming baojuan* describes the sequence of *neidan* practices during the five watches of the night: The "*dharma* body" of the adept moves through various parts of the body where during the first watch he "recognizes the beloved mother (*ren qin niang* 認親娘) at the foot of the Kunlun Mountain." During the second watch he "attains the sand of the Ganges (*de heng sha* 得恆沙)," of which "ordinary men do not know that it is to be sought within the body."[162] During the third watch "light appears in the Dipper Palace and illuminates the four forms of existence. There is no more autumn or summer, nor winter or spring." Finally, during the fifth watch "the dragon and the tiger of the two forests come together. The ten thousand *dharmas* return to the one. One nature encloses [everything]. When water and fire come together, the numinous seedling grows at the foot of the Kunlun Mountain, Non-Being produces Being."[163]

Here, *neidan* practices are the key to the union with the Mother. The Mother and the Kunlun Mountain are within one's own person, which can only be apprehended through the practice of inner alchemy. These practices apparently included the sexual union of male and

[161] *Pujing baojuan,* ch. 27, in *BJCJ,* vol. 5, p. 145.

[162] I do not know what is meant by the "sand of the Ganges" (*hengsha*). It may be a technical term associated with *dansha* 丹砂 "cinnabar".

[163] *Puming baojuan,* ch. 2, in *BJCJ,* vol. 4, pp. 396–398.

Xiuzhen tu (Chart of the Cultivation of Perfection)

female, the coming together of tiger and dragon, of water and fire. Since Mother symbolizes the Absolute as female, union with the Absolute can be compared to the sexual union. We cannot know to which extent sexual rituals were actually practised, but allusions to the joint cultivation of men and women occur too often to be overlooked.[164]

The multiple layers of meaning that the texts have, and which I have tried to illustrate with the symbol *Mother*, make it impossible to decide which meaning was most important to the believers. It is one of the strengths of many sectarian scriptures that they give room to a great variety of possible interpretations, depending on the preexisting knowledge and beliefs of the readers and listeners. In most sectarian groups there were various degrees of initiation, and we may be sure that sexual rituals, if there were any, belonged to the more esoteric part of the tradition. However, the general problem remains that the thinking in correspondences, where one symbol can be equated with another, gives the scriptures multiple layers of meaning. We must be aware of this problem and avoid understanding the symbols too literally. This also applies to the description of the world to come. Consider the following phrase:

> Maitreya descends to the world and distributes the Golden Elixir of which he plants one pill in every family. Men and women swallow it and flash a radiance of light. They follow the buddha and ascend to be united in one *qi*.[165]

This may well have been understood literally by some as the prediction of Maitreya's arrival who will dispense the drug of immortality. However, in the context of *neidan,* Maitreya's descend is just another metaphor for inner experiences of the mind. After all, "the saints and monks are within the human body" as well. The same applies to the numerous references to the Golden Elixir found in the texts, and of course to the symbol "immortality":

> The Buddha has a beneficial treasure that he dispenses to all living beings. If men and women swallow it they will attain immortality (lit. "long life" *changsheng* 長生).[166]

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[164] References to sexual union can also be found elsewhere. See e.g. *Puming baojuan*, ch. 5 (*BJCJ*, vol. 4, p. 416). This passage has been translated by Richard Shek, "Millenarianism without rebellion," p. 322.

[165] *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 30, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 161.

[166] *Puming baojuan*, ch. 6, in *BJCJ*, vol. 4, p. 420.

Understood in a *neidan* context, the Golden Elixir of the Buddha is to be searched within man:

> Refining the elixir (*liandan* 煉丹) and cultivating the genuine *qi* originally occurs in the Great Emptiness. Men do not know that it is just within the one body. Of what use should it be to search for polluted essence and mundane *qi*? The genuine essence is only in the body of the tiger and the dragon. If men attain it, they will have immortality.[167]

Immortality will be reached through the union with the Absolute. This is to return to the origin, or the original state of man. The scriptures describe the radical contrast between the original state of perfection and the actual state of suffering and misery in mythological images. Again, they make use of well-known symbols when they refer to the three cosmic periods ruled by the buddhas of the past, the present, and the future. The depiction of the past period is reminiscent to the description of the uncorrupted state of society in the book of *Laozi*. Men were still near to their original nature. They wore clothes made of grass and lived in caves. They had horns and their general appearance was that of animals, but their mind was human. In this original state everyone lived for thousand years, there were neither death nor birth. Men were enlightened like buddhas and made no distinctions. To mark the complete contrast to the present condition, even natural phenomena were different: The sun moved from west to east instead of from east to west.[168]

Certainly, we cannot exclude the possibility that this description was understood literally by some believers. It is, however, to be assumed that many of them were well aware of the symbolic nature of this mythological imagery. It stands for the original state of men not in a chronological sense but in an ontological one. Man's true nature is uncorrupted, and returning to the origin means to return to this original state where no distinctions are made between self and other. The process of corruption is explained in the *Pujing baojuan* using another mythological theme, the primordial couple Fuxi 扶羲 and Nüwa 女媧, who as creatures of Limitless/Mother are brother and sister. They became the ancestors of all humankind. As men multiplied, families

[167] *Puming baojuan,* ch. 13, in *BJCJ,* vol. 4, p. 457 f. Cf. also chapter 33 where we read: "To refine the Golden Elixir you must take the True Scripture, you do not need to search it outside." (*BJCJ,* vol. 4, p. 565).

[168] *Puming baojuan,* ch. 26, in *BJCJ,* vol. 4, pp. 586 f; *Pujing baojuan,* ch. 23, in *BJCJ,* vol. 5, pp. 130 f.

and clans developed in increasing number. Distinctions were made between the members of different lineages and they contended with each other for worldly goods, fame, and profit. Thus, men forgot that originally they all belonged to the same family. Originally there was no distinction, but this primordial unity is lost. This is the cause of suffering in the present condition.[169]

If making distinctions is the cause of suffering, then deliverance from suffering demands first and foremost a change in men's consciousness. Just as the original state of the past period is a chronological metaphor to depict men's original nature, the symbols "returning to the origin" or "returning to the native place" are spatial metaphors for the realization of one's original nature. The native place or the origin are not to be sought in some distant places, but within the human mind. In the human mind the *qi* of Primordial Beginning can be found, which is the Mother. Therefore, realization of the original unity where no distinctions are made can be experienced as mystical union with the Mother.

But again, the symbolic language allows to express the same meaning with different symbols. The contrast between the present condition and the bliss of enlightenment can be transposed into a chronological sequence. Thus, we find the descriptions of the future world as radically different from the present condition. Nature is re-arranged, time is reckoned differently with eighteen months forming one year and forty-five days a month. But above all, the human condition is changed as all distinctions are abandoned. There will be no more distinction of age and no corporal distinctions, all men being eighteen years old and having a golden body of eight *zhang*. There is no distinction between old and young nor between the sexes. Likewise, there is also "no [distinction between] life and death. As there is no short, there is originally also no long. Only this is the great way to long life (*changsheng* 長生, i.e., immortality)."[170]

On first sight, this appears to be the description of a completely new world. But on a more subtle level it signifies the original state of the human mind where no distinctions exist. Making distinctions is the source of suffering. Thus, abandoning distinctions is the way to deliverance from suffering. Against this background, "immortality" acquires

[169] *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 23, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, pp. 128–130.

[170] *Puming baojuan*, ch. 36 (*BJCJ*, vol. 4, pp. 592–594), quotation on p. 593. Compare also *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 24, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 132.

a new meaning. The search for immortality or long life makes sense only as long as there is a distinction between life and death, between long and short. If all distinctions are cast off, the difference between life and death, between long life and short life loses all meaning, it disappears. In this sense, returning to the original state or meeting the Mother is the great way to immortality.

Relations to other traditions

I have treated some key symbols in early *Huangtian jiao* scriptures to illustrate the difficulties of interpretation. There is no doubt that *neidan* ideas and practices played an important role in the teaching of this religious movement. Although the scriptures use well-known symbols, such as the Unborn Mother, the three cosmic periods, Amitābha and Maitreya, Golden Elixir and immortality, the meaning of these symbols is open to interpretation. Interpretation, however, is a process that is conditioned not only by the texts but equally by the pre-understanding of those who read them or listen to them. Scriptures were not the only means by which teachings were transmitted and the meaning of symbols explained; there was also oral transmission. It may be assumed that the different layers of meaning were intentionally used to cover esoteric teachings that were only unveiled to the initiates. Since modern scholars have nothing but the texts, we must confine ourselves to the insight that it is not possible to know definitely in which way such scriptures were understood by individual believers.

With these reserves, we can nevertheless state that the early teachings of *Huangtian jiao* show strong influence of the Daoist tradition. References to *neidan* terminology and practice are conspicuous, and it is certainly no coincidence that the teaching is repeatedly called *Quanzhen* (Complete Perfection) in the *Puming baojuan*. The teaching is presented as being founded in Quanzhen Daoism, but at the same time to surpass this tradition:

> The great law of the West: Until today it has been transmitted by the patriarchs, but all the myriad schools have not reached an understanding of it. Now you meet a perfect monk who teaches to break through to emptiness, [which is] the Great Way of Complete Perfection (*quanzhen*

dadao). […] Men and women cultivate together and return home with me. They will behold the [realm of] no-birth, behold the [realm of] no-birth.[171]

While Quanzhen Daoists lived in celibacy, the followers of the *Huangtian jiao* were married, and the joint cultivation of men and women clearly marks a departure form the Quanzhen tradition. However, if Patriarch Luo's teaching may be regarded as a sectarian form of lay Buddhism, then the *Huangtian jiao* may be called a sectarian form of lay Daoism.

While *neidan* practices to cultivate the true nature are clearly part of the early *Huangtian jiao* tradition, in the scriptures that we have treated there are little traces of more exoteric Daoist practices such as public rituals. However, there were other scriptures with ritual contents showing that even during the Ming dynasty members of the *Huangtian jiao* also performed public rituals.[172] Besides collective rituals held by the members of the religious community who came together several times a year, they performed rituals on behalf of other people, such as rituals for dead. Just like in common Daoism there were rituals of repentance and rituals to avert misfortune, which included the invocation of various deities. In some places members of the *Huangtian jiao* seem to have acted like Daoist priests, and during the Qing dynasty occasionally regular Daoist priests performed the rituals.[173] Thus, while members of some more Buddhist coloured popular sects occasionally fulfilled the ritual functions of Buddhist monks for the local population, the *Huangtian jiao* may have been perceived as a form of Daoism by many outsiders.

Though the affinity to Daoism is most evident, the *Huangtian jiao* equally shows the influence of other traditions. We have already mentioned the ample use of Buddhist symbols. Buddhism dominated the religious landscape in early modern China to a degree that no religious movement could remain unaffected. Besides, the influence of more heterodox religious traditions is manifest in such symbols as the Unborn Mother and the three cosmic periods. Also some ritual practices point to sectarian traditions. Yan Yuan remarks in his refutation of the *Huangtian jiao* that its members address the sun as "grandpa" (*yeye* 爺

[171] *Puming baojuan*, ch. 14, in *BJCJ*, vol. 4, p. 463. The last sentence *jian wusheng* 見無生 ("behold no-birth") allows the association: "they will meet the Unborn [Mother]."

[172] The *Puming rulai yaoshi zhenjing baochan* 普明如來鑰匙真經寶懺, of which a Ming edition exists, is a ritual handbook. Its unusual length of more than seven hundred pages shows the importance of rituals in *Huangtian jiao* tradition. For details see Ma/Han, pp. 462–465.

[173] Cf. Ma/Han, pp. 462 f.

爺) and the moon as "grandma" (*niangniang* 娘娘).[174] This is of course reminiscent to Patriarch Luo's description of the *Xuangu jiao,* whose members revere sun and moon as father and mother.[175] The same worship of sun and moon is already attested for sects of the Song dynasty.[176] There may be a certain continuity of symbolism. In many sectarian scriptures, including those of Patriarch Luo, there is a conspicuous symbolism of light. In the case of *Huangtian jiao,* it is obvious that the religious names of the leading persons are all associated with light: Puming (Universal Luminous), Puguang (Universal Light), Pujing* (Universal Clean), Puzhao (Universal Shine), Puxian (Universal Bright). In later scriptures it seems that Puming and his wife Puguang were equated with sun and moon, and homage paid to the two celestial bodies as ancestors may in fact signify the veneration of the founding couple.[177] As in other cases, there are multiple meanings of these symbols that do not exclude each other.

Puming founded the *Huangtian jiao* less than half a century after Luo Menghong's death in a region not far from where Luo had been active. It is an intriguing question to ask whether he has been influenced by the Luo Teaching. Evidently, there are considerable differences between the two religious movements. While the Luo Teaching shows strong Buddhist influence, Puming's teachings are nearer to the Daoist tradition. However, already in the title of Puming's scripture the term *wuwei* (Non-Action) figures prominently: *Precious Scroll of the Tathāgata Puming about the Understanding of Wuwei.* The scripture refers to the "Wonderful Law of Non-Action" (*Wuwei miaofa*),[178] repeating an expression found in Luo's scriptures.[179] Furthermore, Puming is called Non-Action Patriarch (*wuwei zu*).[180] This suggests an identification or at least a certain closeness of Puming's teachings to the Luo movement, if it is true that the name *Wuwei* Teaching usually refers to the latter. On the other hand, however, Patriarch Luo is not mentioned a single time

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[174] *Cun ren bian,* p. 152.

[175] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan,* ch. 19, in *BJCJ,* vol. 3, p. 260. According to Luo, also the *Bailian* jiao* venerated sun and moon (p. 249).

[176] See above p. 192.

[177] Cf. Ma/Han, pp. 433–435, 438–441.

[178] *Puming baojuan,* ch. 7, in *BJCJ,* vol. 4, p. 424, see also p. 390.

[179] *Weiwei budong Taishan shen'gen jieguo baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao, j.* 4, ch. 19, p. 65 f.

[180] *Puming baojuan,* ch. 10, in *BJCJ,* vol. 4, p. 441.

and there are no signs that he was venerated as teacher. Quite the contrary, it is stressed that only through Puming and Puxian the true way leading to salvation has been revealed. All schools of the past did not understand it. Without doubt Puming and his followers did not regard their community as being part of the Luo movement. But he certainly was aware of it, since it was very popular during his lifetime. It may well be that through the various teachers he had during his search for enlightenment, he came into contact with sectarian groups related to the Luo movement. In the middle of the sixteenth century the Luo movement had split into various branches and the teachings had received the influence of other traditions. Even his contemporary Yin Ji'nan, who claimed to continue Patriarch Luo's tradition as his reincarnation, had adopted elements that were foreign to the teachings in Luo's writings. Although we do not know from which tradition Yin Ji'nan's teacher came, it is noteworthy that he introduced religious affiliation names with the character *pu*, the same which became common in the *Huangtian jiao*. Such religious affiliation names can be traced back to the White Lotus movement of the Song dynasty, but there is no evidence that Yin Ji'nan or Puming were particularly close to this tradition. Also the symbols used by Yin Ji'nan suggest that he might have been exposed to religious traditions similar to those that influenced Puming. Both talk about *Wusheng Laomu* and the three cosmic periods,[181] which like the use of affiliation characters is not found in Luo's writings. Furthermore, Yin Ji'nan's teachings make more use of Daoist symbols than Patriarch Luo.[182] Thus, there are some similarities between Yin Ji'nan's and Puming's teachings that cannot be attributed to the Luo tradition. These similarities are not strong enough to assume that both had been influenced by the same sect. However, Yin Ji'nan's teachings show that some decades after Luo, branches of his movement had already reinterpreted some of his teachings under the influence of other traditions. Given the prominent position that the term *wuwei* has in Puming's scripture, it is likely that he had been in contact with teachers who belonged to the Luo tradition.

[181] They do not seem to have been influenced by the same sectarian tradition, since Yin Ji'nan calls the first period *huangyang** 黃楊 (yellow willow) (*Sanshi yinyou*, *j.* 2, 29a), while it is called *qingyang* (Green *Yang*) in the *Huangtian jiao* (*Pujing baojuan,* ch. 23, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 130).

[182] See *Sanshi yinyou*, *j.* 2, 31a-32b. Reference is made to the opening of the Three Passes (*sanguan*), the Mysterious Pass (*xuanguan*) and the apertures (*qiao*). One cannot say, however, that a *neidan* context is conspicuous.

Puming's claim to reveal the correct understanding of *wuwei* should be taken seriously as his own conviction. If we disregard that Luo preferred the symbolic language of Buddhism while Puming used Daoist symbols, both teachings have more in common than it seems at first sight. Both offer ways to delivery from the world of suffering. For both, salvation is not to be found through conventional religious practices such as reciting *sūtras* or erecting temples,[183] but through the realization of the fundamental unity of all being. Making distinctions between self and other for both is the source of suffering. They do not seek salvation in another world but through enlightenment of the mind. They even share a common stock of key symbols to explain their teachings, such as "returning home", Mother, Limitless, and Emptiness. Although this does not proof a direct dependency of Puming from Patriarch Luo, it shows that they took part in the same religious milieu. It was, however, not exactly the same, since Patriarch Luo had narrow contacts with Buddhist circles, while Puming was nearer to Daoist ones. As we have seen, there were others, including Qin Dongshan, who interpreted the *Wuwei* teaching under the influence of the Confucian tradition.[184] The religious milieu in which the new religious movements of the Ming dynasty moved was marked by four poles and their mutual interaction: Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and the unofficial popular traditions. Depending on which pole was closest, they preferred different symbolic languages and laid stress on different aspects. Luo Menghong was closer to the Buddhist pole, and Puming approached Daoism. Others, including Lin Zhao'en 林兆恩, were more attracted by Confucianism. And there were those who were closer to the popular traditions with their millenarian elements. Popular religious movements moved between these four poles of attraction and during their history could change position within this field repeatedly.

I should stress this last point because it has methodological implications for the study of popular religious movements. Since they moved in a field where they were exposed to different and changing influences, their position was not fixed. A sectarian group that grew out of a tradition close to the Buddhist pole could move nearer to the pole of

[183] Like Patriarch Luo, Puming calls such conventional practices *youwei fa* 有為法 (*Puming baojuan,* ch. 22, in *BJCJ,* vol. 4, p. 509).

[184] See above p. 242. Incidentally, the title of Qin Dongshan's scripture *Wuwei zhengzong liaoyi baojuan (Precious scroll on the Understanding of the Orthodox school of Non-Action)* resembles that of the *Puming baojuan*. Puming may have known this scripture and offered his own interpretation of the understanding of *wuwei*.

millenarian traditions, as in the case of the *Zhaijiao*, which later moved back to the Buddhist pole. The methodological implication is that it is only of limited value if we know the origins and early teachings of a given sectarian group. While scriptures tend to be stable, the way to understand them is flexible. To conclude the chapter on the *Huangtian jiao*, we may illustrate the interaction of different traditions with the further history of one of its branches.

A late scripture that can be identified as belonging to the *Huangtian jiao* tradition is the *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan* 眾喜粗言寶卷 (*Precious Volume with the Coarse Sayings of Zhongxi*, short: *Zhongxi baojuan*), which was first printed in 1821.[185] The scripture contains a list of the various manifestations of saints sent by the Mother to reveal the true teaching. The seventh in this line is Puming, followed by Puguang, Pujing, and Wang Pushan 汪普善 as tenth and last transformation.[186] This shows that the scripture stands in the tradition of Pujing's branch of the *Huangtian jiao*.

It seems that after Pujing's death his community split into two or more groups, one of which was led by Wang Pushan who was also known as Wang Changsheng 汪長生 (died 1640).[187] The sectarian lineage founded by Wang Changsheng alias Pushan appears under different names, among them *Yuandun jiao* 圓頓教 (Teaching of Complete and Sudden [Enlightenment])[188] and *Changsheng jiao* 長生教 (Teaching of Changsheng, or Teaching of Long Life). Under the influence of Wang Changsheng, the *Huangtian jiao* tradition entered a different social environment. He was a native of Zhejiang province in south China,

[185] *BJCJ*, vol. 20–21 has a reprint of an edition from the Republican period. For details about this scripture cf. Ma/Han, pp. 483–487; Yu Songqing 喻松青, "Zhejiang Changsheng jiao he «Zhongxi baojuan» 浙江長生教和《眾喜寶卷》," in *Minjian mimi zongjiao jingjuan yanjiu* 民間秘密宗教經卷研究, Taibei: Lianjing, 1994, pp. 273–321.

[186] *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan*, *j.* 5, in *BJCJ*, vol. 21, pp. 386 f.

[187] *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan*, *j.* 5, in *BJCJ*, vol. 21, pp. 386 f. That Wang Changsheng's sect did not represent the whole of Pujing's tradition can be derived from the fact that the *Longhua jing* lists both, Pujing and Pushan, as leaders of different sects.—Ma/Han (p. 475) state that Wang Changsheng was born in 1604 (Wanli 32). However, the text says that in that year "the divine light appeared," which probably referred to Wang Changsheng's enlightenment. 1604 cannot be the year of his birth since in that case he would have been too young to become a senior leader who rivalled Yao Wenyu in influence (see above p. 256).

[188] The *Longhua jing* mentions a *Yuandun jiao* of patriarch Pushan, probably referring to Wang Pushan (*Gufo Tianzhen kaozheng Longhua baojing*, ch. 23, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 737a). The name *Yuandun jiao* was already used by Pujing for his teaching. Its meaning is explained in *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 1, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 46).

where he had been a leading member of Yao Wenyu's sect. When he separated from Yao Wenyu he draw a considerable number of members of this sect with him.[189] Thus, his following consisted mainly of persons who first belonged to a community of the Luo tradition in south China. Wang fused his own group with that of his new teacher, who had brought Pujing's *Huangtian jiao* tradition from the North to Zhejiang.[190] Although the line of patriarchs identifies Wang Changsheng's sect with Pujing's branch of the *Huangtian jiao*, it was actually a new tradition. Since a substantial number of its members first belonged to the *Zhaijiao* of Yin Ji'nan's heritage, it is not surprising to find that in the eighteenth century the communities of the *Changsheng jiao* shared many traits with those of the *Zhaijiao*. The *Changsheng jiao* maintained vegetarian halls (*zhaitang*) that were organized in the same way as those of the *Zhaijiao*, and at least the outward appearance of the sect was Buddhist. When the authorities investigated the *Changsheng jiao* in 1727, they found Wang Changsheng's tomb near a vegetarian hall where the *Heart Sūtra* (*Xin jing* 心經) was kept.[191] There were further investigations in 1748 and 1768. The *Changsheng jiao* was not involved in any rebellion and the scriptures found, among them the *Pujing baojuan*, did not contain any objectionable teachings. Nevertheless, they were burned when in 1769 the sect was severely suppressed and persecuted. All vegetarian halls were razed to the ground, the leading members executed or banished, and the tombs of Wang Changsheng and other deceased leaders destroyed.[192]

The tradition surfaced again in the nineteenth century in Jiangxi when Chen Zhongxi 陳眾喜 published the *Zhongxi baojuan*. This scripture again presents a different variety of the *Huangtian jiao* tradition because its main orientation is Confucian. Confucianism (*Rujiao* 儒教) is called the root of all teachings, and Confucius is considered to be the first manifestation of the *Rutong* 儒童 (*Ru* Lad), with Wang Changsheng as his tenth manifestation.[193] *Rutong* or *Rutong Yufo* 儒童玉佛 (Jade-Buddha *Rutong*) here has the same position as has the Key-Buddha in the *Pujing baojuan*. He is sent by the Mother to take human form in a succession

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[189] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 8a/b. For Yao Wenyu see above pp. 255 ff.

[190] Cf. Wang Jianchuan, "Jintong jiao san lun," p. 36, note 77.

[191] Cf. Ma/Han, pp. 480 f.

[192] *Shiliao xunkan*, no. 15, 529b-530a, memorial by Yong De 永德, Qianlong 34/3/19 (1769).

[193] *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan, j.* 5, in *BJCJ*, vol. 21, p. 384.

of saints who reveal the true teaching.[194] While the book still uses many traditional symbols of the *Huangtian jiao*, it breathes the spirit of Confucianism: "Among the Three Teachings Confucianism has the upmost position. Among the four classes of men scholars are the first. Therefore, Confucianism is called the root."[195] A tradition that half a century before had been persecuted as a heterodox sect here presents a teaching supporting the conventional values of the ruling elites. In the course of history the *Huangtian jiao* tradition had thus repeatedly changed its position between the poles of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. As we shall see later, there were developments that moved parts of this tradition closer to the pole of popular millenarianism.

3. Hongyang Jiao (Vast Yang Teaching)*

During the second half of the sixteenth century popular religious movements mushroomed. For some reasons most of the emerging new sects were concentrated in Northern Zhili (roughly present Hebei province) and the neighbouring provinces. This apparent concentration of sects in north China may be due to the fact that more documents have preserved from this region than from the rest of the country. As we have seen, the Luo Teaching spread to the lower Yangtze region in the early decades of the sixteenth century where it merged with existing sectarian traditions. Further research may uncover sources offering a more detailed picture of religious movements in other parts of China. However, on the basis of the information available, the northern provinces seem to have been a particularly fertile ground for new religious movements in late Ming. Their flourishing was fostered by a variety of reasons and coincidences. As we have seen, popular religious movements were active in this region since the Han dynasty and thus had deeply penetrated local culture. Another factor contributing to the proliferation of religious movements may have been increased social mobility in the capital area that weakened traditional social structures. More than remote and isolated areas, the capital region brought forth social mobility and, therefore, individuals searching for new forms of community and social networks. New religious movements could fill that gap. Further-

[194] *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan*, preface (*BJCJ*, vol. 20, p. 29). *Rutong* is here called *Rutong Yufo* 儒童玉佛 (Jade-Buddha *Rutong*).

[195] *Zhongxi cuyan baojuan*, preface (*BJCJ*, vol. 20, p. 32).

more, the growth of new religious movements in northern China seems to have been a self-reinforcing process that developed its own internal dynamics. It is evident from the late sixteenth century *baojuan* that they were not the products of singular religious experiences and teachings but rather a literary genre flourishing in religious milieus that extended far beyond the boundaries of particular sectarian communities. Without neglecting the peculiarities of different sects, we can say that their teachings relied on a common stock of themes, symbols, and practices. This common tradition of sectarian beliefs surfaced only slowly, and here and there condensed to literary documents. By the end of the sixteenth century it had developed into a full-fledged literary tradition. While sect leaders continued to produce their own scriptures claiming to offer a unique teaching and singular way to salvation, the more the number of these scriptures increased the more they appear as samples of a common literary tradition. It is quite clear that the authors drew from common sources, and these sources increasingly were literary ones. The spread of *baojuan* literature, which had been advanced in the sixteenth century in North China by the popularity of Patriarch Luo's writings, reinforced the further production of similar books. At the same time, the wide use of scriptures among sectarian groups in North China gave them singular means of propagation, historical identity, and a continuity unmatched by the numerous local sects that without any doubt existed in other parts of the country during the same time.

The *Hongyang* jiao*[196] 弘陽教 (Vast Yang Teaching) is a good example to demonstrate the mutual influence of different sectarian traditions. The biography of its founder and the basic scriptures of this sect show that from its beginnings it interacted with other sects and their teachings, no less than with the Daoist and Buddhist traditions. The dynamics of interaction, which shaped the history not only of the *Hongyang* jiao* but of all popular religious movements, becomes manifest in the formation of sectarian networks extending beyond the limits of particular sectarian traditions. This will be illustrated with the involvement of the *Hongyang jiao* in the *Bagua* rebellion of 1813.

[196] The term *hongyang** is marked with an asterisk if it corresponds to the Chinese characters 弘陽 (vast *yang*), to distinguish it from *hongyang* 紅陽 (red *yang*). The asterisk is not applied if *hongyang** appears in the title of books in the footnotes and the bibliography. There are two more homophones appearing in the sources: *hongyang*† 洪陽 (huge *yang*) and *hongyang*# 宏陽 (great *yang*).

The Hongyang Teaching of Piaogao*

The *Hongyang* jiao* is one of the better known sects of the sixteenth century because it left a considerable number of *baojuan*. Furthermore, it is mentioned in the sect list of the *Longhua jing*. There, the additional information is added that it goes back to patriarch Piaogao (Piaogao *zu* 飄高祖).[197] As in many other cases, the sectarian tradition connected with Piaogao also used other names, such as *Hunyuanmen jiao* 混元門教 (Teaching of the School of Chaos Origin) and *Yuandun* jiao* 源沌教 (Teaching of Primordial Chaos).[198] Patriarch Piaogao, who is considered to be the founder of the *Hongyang* jiao*, was born in 1570.[199] He was a native of Guangpingfu 廣平府 prefecture in the southern part of Zhili. His secular name was Han Taihu 韓太湖. At the age of nineteen he left home to become a religious seeker. Wandering through Jiangsu and Henan he sought instruction from various teachers. Finally he became a disciple of a Master Wang 王師父, who was said to be a reincarnation of Śākyamuni Buddha. The school of Master Wang was called *Hunyuan men* and *Hongyang* jiao*.[200] We may thus regard Master Wang as the real founder of the *Hongyang* jiao*. Of course, Master Wang probably also had a teacher, which shows once more how difficult it is to define the beginning of a particular sectarian tradition. Master Wang's sect would have been lost in the mist of the past had not his disciple Han Taihu decided to follow the example of other teachers of the time by casting his message into written form.

Han Taihu, alias Piaogao, went to Peking at the age of twenty-six where he quickly attracted followers within the imperial administration. Richard Shek supposes that he probably had relatives or close friends working in imperial offices, for he soon earned the confidence of palace eunuchs and other influential persons. Among them was the *Dingguo Gong* 定國公 (Duke Who Established the Nation) who belonged to a family of highest nobility intimately connected with the Ming imperial

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[197] *Longhua jing*, ch. 23, in *MJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 736a. The text has *Hongyang# jiao* 宏陽教.

[198] *Hunyuan Hongyang linfan Piaogao jing*, *j.* 1, introduction, in *BJCJ*, vol. 16, p. 361 f.

[199] For a discussion of Piaogao's identity and his biography see Shek, *Religion and society in late Ming*, pp. 277–283; Ma/Han, pp. 495–498; Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, pp. 321–328.

[200] *Hongyang kugong wudao jing*, ch. 10, in *BJCJ*, vol. 15, pp. 234–239, ch. 12, pp. 259, 266 for the name *Hongyang* jiao*.

house.[201] Besides political support, these connections provided material assistance for the publication of Piaogao's scriptures. One of his protectors was Duke Shi 石公 of the Palace Printing Bureau who arranged for his books to be printed in the imperial printing office. The result were lavishly decorated imprints that belong to the finest examples of *baojuan* and became items much sought after in sectarian circles. Piaogao could not enjoy his success in the capital for a long time for he died already in 1598, only four years after his arrival in Peking.

Piaogao was not the founder of a new teaching but rather a teacher who continued existing traditions and condensed them in his own writings. In this he followed a practice that had become more and more popular since Patriarch Luo had published his scriptures almost a century before. The influence of Patriarch Luo's *Five Books in Six Volumes* on the formation of Piaogao's writings is conspicuous. The titles of two of them clearly parallel titles of Luo's.[202] It is, however, not only the titles of these scriptures that show the influence of these earlier *baojuan* but also their content and language. The *Hongyang* kugong wudao jing* 弘陽苦功悟道經, (*Hongyang* Scripture on Enlightenment through Bitter Effort*) is Piaogao's (auto)biography that describes his religious search in a way obviously copying Luo's biography in the *Kugong wudao juan*. So strong is the paradigm of Luo's language that even the experience of enlightenment, which must have been a very personal and intimate affair, is described in similar and sometimes identical words.[203] This

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[201] Piaogao's support by high officials is reported in the opening section of all early *Hongyang** scriptures, which is translated in Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, pp. 323 f. *Dingguo Gong* was a hereditary status granted to the descendants of Xu Da 徐達, who had been the first among Zhu Yuanzhang's commanders in the founding of the Ming dynasty. Cf. Edward L. Farmer, "Hsü Ta," in *Dictionary of Ming biography, 1368–1644*, vol. 1, edited by L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1976, pp. 602–608.

[202] *Hongyang kugong wudao jing* is almost identical with Luo's autobiography *Kugong wudao juan*, and the *Hongyang tanshi jing* is clearly modelled after Luo's *Tanshi wuwei juan*.

[203] *Hongyang kugong wudao jing*, ch. 24 (*BJCJ*, vol. 15, pp. 400 f) describes the enlightening experience with the words *hong guang she zhao ji* (reading 己 for 巳) *shen, ziran xin di kaitong, xin hua fa lang* 紅光攝照己身，自然心地開通，心花發朗. These expressions are almost verbatim taken from the *Kugong wudao juan*, where we read: *bai guang she zhao wo shen* 白光攝照我身 (*BJCJ*, vol. 1, p. 153) and a few lines later: *xin hua fa lang, xin di kai tong* 心花發朗，心地開通 (p. 154). For a translation of the passage in the *Kugong wudao juan* see above p. 220. There are further parallels in the two texts. The experience of enlightenment is also described in the *Hongyang wudao mingxin, j.* 1, ch. 7 (*BJCJ*, vol. 16, p. 114 f), which again repeats almost verbatim formulations of the *Kugong wudao juan* (*BJCJ*, vol. 1, p. 153).

shows that Piaogao situated his own writings within a commonly known literary tradition, while at the same time claiming superiority for his own teaching. In the *Hunyuan Hongyang* linfan Piaogao jing* 混元弘陽臨凡飄高經 (*Hunyuan-Hongyang* Scripture on Piaogao's Descent to the World*) Patriarch Luo is explicitly mentioned as the third manifestation of the Venerable Sandalwood Patriarch. The book reports that he founded the *Dacheng jiao* and left the Scriptures in Five Books (*Wubu jing* 五部經). But it is added: "How can [his teaching] be compared to our *Hunyuan men* (School of Chaos Origin) which came down [to the earth] to cultivate the way?"[204] Piaogao does not reject Luo's teaching, but respects it as a forerunner in a literary tradition to which his own works are a new and in his view superior contribution.

The basic structure of the *Hongyang** teaching is similar to what we know from earlier *baojuan*.[205] Not surprisingly, some new symbols are introduced such as a new name for the main deity, which is called *Hunyuan Laozu* 混元老祖 (Venerable Patriarch Chaos Origin), and many other divine beings. *Hunyuan* was since the Song dynasty an epithet of *Taishang Laojun*, the defied Laozi. Daoist heritage is evident in *Hongyang** scriptures. Venerable Patriarch Chaos Origin arose out of the unmovable Emptiness (*xukong*) and in the well-known sequence of Daoist cosmogony produced everything.[206] Thus, he may be understood as a personalized form of the *Dao*, which in the scriptures of other sects such as the *Huangtian jiao* is symbolized as *Wuji* or *Wusheng Laomu*. The Venerable Patriarch Chaos Origin also resembles the Unborn Venerable Mother (or Venerable Mother No-Birth) in other respects. He sends down divine messengers to rescue mankind which is facing the destruction of the end of the present *kalpa*. The first to descend is Śākyamuni who is followed by other patriarchs, buddhas, and bodhisattvas. The *Hunyuan Hongyang* linfan Piaogao jing* narrates in great detail how they must be urged to be reborn to the Eastern Land because they are unwilling to endure the hardship and bitterness of human existence. One of the countless patriarchs, buddhas, and bodhisattvas abiding in the palaces of the Golden City is Piaogao, who is one of the fourteen sons of the Venerable Patriarch Limitless (*wuji laozu* 無極老祖).[207] He

[204] *Hunyuan Hongyang linfan Piaogao jing*, *j.* 2, ch. 24, in *BJCJ*, vol. 17, pp. 153 f.

[205] Summaries of a number of *Hongyang* baojuan* are given by Overmyer (*Precious volumes*, pp. 320–343.

[206] *Hunyuan Hongyang linfan Piaogao jing*, *j.* 1, ch. 1, in *BJCJ*, vol. 16, p. 374.

[207] *Hunyuan Hongyang linfan Piaogao jing*, *j.* 1, ch. 6, in *BJCJ*, vol. 16, p. 429.

is afraid of being sent down and separated from his divine mother. The second volume of the book is almost completely devoted to the various attempts to convince and urge Piaogao to fulfil his mission to rescue mankind. Finally heavenly soldiers and immortals escort him to a celestial palace to await rebirth as a human.[208] The patriarch immediately preceding Piaogao is the Venerable Patriarch Sandalwood (*zhantan laozu* 栴檀老祖)[209] who manifested himself thrice, his last appearance being Patriarch Luo.[210] Thus, Patriarch Luo is integrated in the salvation myth of the *Hongyang* jiao*.

Despite the many mythological details and the immense numbers of supernatural beings acting in this scenario, the message of this narrative is simple and follows a well-known pattern. Piaogao is the final messenger sent down by a merciful creator deity to disclose the teaching that alone will rescue the believers from the impending catastrophes of the end of the *kalpa*. In a later text of the *Hongyang* jiao* the Venerable Patriarch Chaos Origin explains the value of this teaching in a *gāthā*:

> When the end of the *kalpa* is approaching in the Eastern Land and the sky will break with the sound of destruction, living beings will have no shelter to find protection. Various teachings arise everywhere in the world, but since they lack the dark and wonderful principles [of our teaching], how can one escape sinking [into annihilation]? Now in my mercy and compassion I have explained [this book of] repentance to save all living beings. By this [book] one can eliminate the sins of greed and hate and eradicate the bad karma accumulated in thousand years. This [book of] repentance removes all evils and sins, and allows to reach soon one's true origin (*ben zong* 本宗).[211]

Here we find another important element of the *Hongyang** Teaching. The base of all misery and the reason for destruction and annihilation are the sins of men. Accordingly, moral reform is the precondition for escaping from the sorrowful cycle of birth and death. This is the main theme of the *Hongyang* tanshi jing* 弘陽嘆世經 (*Hongyang* Scripture on Sorrow for the World*).[212] The scripture castigates the four vices of wine,

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[208] *Hunyuan Hongyang linfan Piaogao jing*, *j.* 2, ch. 21, in *BJCJ*, vol. 17, p. 114.

[209] *Hunyuan Hongyang linfan Piaogao jing*, *j.* 1, ch. 11, in *BJCJ*, vol. 16, p. 484.

[210] *Hunyuan Hongyang linfan Piaogao jing*, *j.* 2, ch. 24, in *BJCJ*, vol. 17, pp. 140–159.

[211] *Xiaoshi Hunyuan Hongyang mingxin zhonghua baochan* 銷釋混元弘陽明心中華寶懺, *j.* 1, in *MJZJ*, vol. 6, p. 843.

[212] *Hongyang tanshi jing*, in *MJZJ*, vol. 6, pp. 723–748. For a description cf. Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, pp. 330–332.

lust, avarice, and hate, which led men astray in the Eastern World so that they will never be able to return home to the origin.[213] All men and women, including monks and nuns, Daoists and lay believers, are urged to correct their sinful lives. Monks who do not adhere to the pure precepts will be reborn as cattle, while evil Daoists will take the form of water buffalos.[214]

Not surprisingly, it is only through belief in the *Hongyang** teachings that rebirth in a lower existence can be avoided. Those who do not believe will be reborn as hungry ghosts.[215] In the main, however, the morality taught is conventional and does not depart from what is considered proper behaviour in Chinese society. Moral condemnation concerns only individual behaviour but not the general conditions of society or even the state. There is no criticism of social inequality. The wealthy are taught that their worldly fortunes will induce them to strive for fame, wine, and meat and, therefore, prevent them from doing the good.[216] However, this only means that they will hardly be able to change their minds and to escape punishment after death. While this may give some satisfaction to the underprivileged, it remains a purely religious evaluation without any political implications. Far from advocating a change in the social and political order, the scripture teaches that high position and wealth are due to fate (*ming* 命) and cannot be changed.[217] There is nothing revolutionary in the *Hongyang** teachings which could evoke the suspicion of the ruling classes. Piaogao presented his own teachings as a continuation and reaffirmation of the three traditions founded by Śākyamuni, Laozi, and Confucius.[218] It is he who reveals the eternal truth in the present age, but like the earlier sages and patriarchs he only acts as agent of the ultimate deity *Hunyuan Laozu* (Venerable Patriarch Chaos Origin) who has sent down his messenger to rescue mankind from the sea of sorrow.

[213] *Hongyang tanshi jing*, ch. 11, in *MJZJ*, vol. 6, pp. 737–741.
[214] *Hongyang tanshi jing*, ch. 16, in *MJZJ*, vol. 6, p. 744b.
[215] *Hongyang tanshi jing*, ch. 2, in *MJZJ*, vol. 6, p. 728a.
[216] *Hongyang tanshi jing*, ch. 5, in *MJZJ*, vol. 6, p. 729c.
[217] *Hongyang tanshi jing*, ch. 17, in *MJZJ*, vol. 6, p. 746b.
[218] *Hunyuan Hongyang Piaogao linfan jing*, *j.* 2, ch. 23, in *BJCJ*, vol. 17, pp. 127–139.

Sectarian teachings and common traditions

Piaogao's teachings were not revolutionary in a political sense, nor were they revolutionary in religious terms. His teachings are an example for the condensation of religious beliefs and ideas that at the end of the sixteenth century were part of the religious traditions in northern China. Some of these traditions, namely, the three teachings of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, had their own literary heritage. At the same time, however, their ideas and symbols were widely diffused in popular culture and there was no need to be highly educated to be familiar with them. Other elements of the common tradition were not part of the literary culture of the elites, but they equally were widely available as diffused lore of the popular culture. With the development of *baojuan* literature some of these popular beliefs and symbols, which were mostly passed on orally, surfaced in the form of scriptures. Many of the symbols used in sectarian *baojuan* had a long history that in some cases can be traced back to the sixth century or even earlier. For reasons that are not completely clear, after the Buddhist apocrypha of the Tang dynasty, which have been saved in the caves of Dunhuang, scriptures expressing heterodox popular religious beliefs are almost completely missing. Thus, for the period prior to the emergence of *baojuan* literature, we simply have no detailed information about religious traditions that were not part of the official literary culture. The early *baojuan* are the first written documents that give us a glimpse at religious beliefs whose earlier history remains in the dark.[219]

The *Hongyang** scriptures make it clear that the teaching they proclaim are not new but part of a long tradition. In the introduction to the *Hongyang* kugong wudao jing*, which is repeated in many other *Hongyang** texts, it is explained that the School of Chaos Origin (*Hunyuan men* 混元門) originated before the appearance of the first Buddha Bhiṣmagarjitasvararāja (Weiyin 威音) at the time when the primordial chaos was divided. Originally, there were no Three Teachings when the *dharma* of *Hongyang** emanated through transformation of the Chaos Origin

[219] It should be repeated, however, that the sectarian traditions before the sixteenth century also made use of scriptures. This is confirmed by the long list of heterodox scriptures found during the Chenghua era (1465–1487) among sectarians in Shanxi. A list of these scriptures was made public in the empire to destroy them. Their possession was threatened with the death penalty, and most of them seem to be lost now. Cf. *Yongchuang xiaopin* 湧幢小品, by Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959, *j.* 32, pp. 765 f; Yu Jideng 余繼登, *Diangu jiwen* 典故紀聞, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981, *j.* 15, pp. 266 f.

(*hunyuan*).[220] Like many other *baojuan*, these scriptures present their teachings in a cosmological context claiming that they exist since primordial times. However, there are still more concrete references to the history of the *Hongyang** teaching. It is said that since the beginning of the Ming dynasty succeeding patriarchs of this school have written scriptures to transmit the three teachings. While there were numerous teachers, only a few were enlightened and left scriptures. In this situation a perfected man (*zhenren* 真人) has appeared in the world to fully explain the awakening of the mind through apprehending one's own nature. Thus, the buddha has established the Teaching of Patriarch Chaos Origin.[221]

The *Hongyang** teaching places itself in a tradition of sectarian teachings flourishing since the early Ming dynasty. As we have seen, Piaogao had been the disciple of a teacher named Master Wang, whose school was called *Hunyuan men* (School of Chaos Origin). We know nothing about the precursors of Master Wang, but the prominent position of the term *hunyuan* shows a certain influence of ideas and notions stemming from Daoist traditions. The Song Daoist encyclopedia *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 explains *hunyuan* as that which existed before the pristine chaos (*hundun* 混沌) and is the beginning of the primordial *qi* (*yuanqi* 元氣).[222] Beginning in the Song dynasty, the expression *hunyuan* was part of the honorific title of *Taishang Laojun*, the deified Laozi.[223] During the Jin (1115–1234) and the Yuan (1206–1368) dynasties a Daoist sect using the name *Hunyuan* is mentioned in the sources.[224] We

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[220] *Hongyang kugong wudao jing*, preface, in *BJCJ*, vol. 15, pp. 135 f.

[221] *Hongyang kugong wudao jing*, preface, in *BJCJ*, vol. 15, pp. 145 f.

[222] *Yunji qiqian*, *j.* 2, 6a.

[223] In 1013, the Song emperor Zhenzong bestowed on *Taishang Laojun* the title *Taishang Laojun hunyuan shangde huangdi* 太上老君混元上德皇帝 (Highest Lord Lao, August Emperor of Highest Virtue of Chaos Origin). Cf. Shi Yanfeng 石衍豐, "Taishang Laojun 太上老君," in *Zhonghua Daojiao da cidian* 中華道教大辭典, edited by Hu Fuchen 胡孚琛, Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995, pp. 1448–1449: 1449.

[224] In 1191, an edict was promulgated forbidding to receive *Taiyi* 太一 and *Hunyuan* amulets and to build private cloisters (*Jinshi* 金史, by Tuotuo 脱脱, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975 (1997), *j.* 9, p. 217). During the Yuan dynasty a *Hunyuan* sect existed, which is mentioned together with other Daoist sects (*Zhanran jushi ji* 湛然居士集, by Yelü Chucai 耶律楚材, in *SKQS*, vol. 1191, *j.* 8, p. 565a). This is confirmed in *Yuxizi danding zhiyao* 玉谿子丹經指要, by Li Jianyi 李簡易 (DZTY 244), in *WWDZ*, vol. 4, pp. 404 f) of the 13th century. At the beginning of this scripture there is a chart entitled *Hunyuan xian pai zhi tu* 混元仙派之圖 (*Chart of the Chaos Immortal line of transmission*), which suggests that *Huanyuan* was the name of a school of *neidan* Daoism. Cf. also Ren Jiyu, ed., *Zhongguo Daojiao shi*, pp. 490–495.

have no information about the further history of this Daoist *Hunyuan* sect, but it is clear that the symbol of *hunyuan* was current long before Han Taihu's teacher used it as a name for his school. Although originally a Daoist symbol, it had become part of a common tradition that in the sixteenth century could be applied in diverse contexts. Thus, in 1579, some decades before Han Taihu met Master Wang, another sectarian teacher surnamed Wang was put to death because he had gathered a following of more than six thousand people. Wang Duo 王鐸, who was active in northwest Shandong, was a former Buddhist monk and called himself Head of the Three Yang Assembly of Heaven and Earth (*tiandi sanyang hui zhu* 天地三陽會主). The centre of his sect was a building called Hall of the Three *Yang* (*sanyang dian* 三陽殿) where statues of the Chaos Origin Ruler (*hunyuan zhu* 混元主) and the three buddhas were venerated.[225] It is also reported that Wang Duo fabricated scriptures, but nothing is said about their content. However, the symbols used show that Wang Duo drew from the same stock as later did Piaogao and his *Hongyang** Teaching. The Chaos Origin Ruler seems to have been the main deity equivalent to the Venerable Patriarch Chaos Origin, while the three Buddhas apparently refer to the buddhas of the three *yang*, the three cosmic periods. In most sectarian writings these three periods are called Green Yang, Red Yang, and White Yang, whereas in *Hongyang** scriptures they are written with different though homophonous characters as Pure Yang (*qingyang** 清陽), Vast Yang (*hongyang** 弘陽) and White Yang (*baiyang*).[226]

The symbolism of the three *yang* periods was generally known in sectarian milieus of the sixteenth century. Although it does not figure prominently in the early *Hongyang** scriptures, it was obviously known and taken for granted. Accordingly, the Buddha Śākyamuni is said to be the ruler of the *hongyang** era. The substitution of the more common *hongyang* 紅陽 (red *yang*) for *hongyang** 弘陽 (vast *yang*) can possibly be explained by the fact that the popular religious traditions were in many cases transmitted orally, which easily brought up confusion of homophonous characters. There were still other variants such as *hongyang*[#] 宏陽 (great *yang*)[227] and *hongyang*[†] 洪陽 (huge *yang*), which is attested in the title of a sectarian scripture in the fifteenth century.[228]

[225] *Ming shilu*, *Shenzong shilu*, *j*. 83, 5a (Wanli 7/1/23 [1579]).

[226] Cf. *Hongyang kugong wudao jing*, preface, in *BJCJ*, vol. 15, pp. 136 f.

[227] Cf. note 197 on p. 320 and note 246 on p. 333.

[228] Cf. *Yongchuang xiaopin*, p. 766, where a *Jinxiao hongyang*[†] *da ce* 金銷洪陽大策

More than a century before Piaogao, the symbol *hongyang* was already current in sectarian circles, and even if it was written with diverse characters it apparently referred to the same idea.[229] The earliest evidence of this idea can be found in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, which was published in 1430. There we find the full-fledged cosmological scheme with the three phases of *qingyang*, *hongyang*, and *baiyang* ruled by the three Buddhas Dīpaṃkara, Śākyamuni and Maitreya. And it is, of course, Śākyamuni who is in charge of the *Hongyang jiao* 紅陽教 (Red *Yang* Teaching),[230] which is also called *Hongyang zhengfa* (Orthodox Teaching of Red Yang).[231] Thus, *Hongyang fa* or *Hongyang jiao* was a common expression to denote the teaching of salvation revealed in the present *kalpa*, the age of *hongyang*. We find it again in the *Yaoshi benyuan gongde baojuan* 藥師本願功德寶卷 (*Precious Scroll about the Original Vows and Merits of the Teacher of Medicine*),[232] which was published in 1544, half a century before Piaogao founded his sect in Peking. While we cannot say, therefore, that the *Yaoshi benyuan gongde baojuan* was a scripture of the *Hongyang* jiao*, it is clear that the teachings of this sect were part of an older tradition.

This has to be taken into account if we attempt to apprehend the beliefs of those who turned to popular religious sects, be it the *Hongyang* jiao* or any other. The scriptures produced by certain teachers should not be considered to be comprehensive summaries of dogmatic systems, but rather read as contributions to a religious interpretation of human life, destiny, and salvation building on a commonly known repertory of symbols and beliefs. Of course, "commonly known" does not mean that all of these symbols and ideas were known to everybody in Chinese society. Even in the realm of Buddhism not all symbols and ideas were known to everyone. But just as Buddhist notions were known in varying density to many people that were neither monks nor devoted lay Buddhists, knowledge of the basic beliefs and mythological themes prevailing

(*Great Plan of the Huge Yang Melted in Gold*) is mentioned as one of the heterodox scriptures found during the Chenghua era (1465–1487).

[229] Among the heterodox scriptures listed in Zhu Guozhen's *Yongchuang xiaopin* (p. 766) is a *Zhenguo ding sanshi yang li* 鎮國定三世陽曆 (*Calendar to Determine the Yang of the Three Ages for the Protection of the State*), which shows that *yang* ("sun") was associated with the three cosmic periods.

[230] *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, opening section, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, pp. 234 f, 238 f.

[231] *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, ch. 2, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 263.

[232] *Yaoshi benyuan gongde baojuan* 藥師本願功德寶卷, in *BJCJ*, vol. 14, p. 271. For this *baojuan* see Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, pp. 308–310.

in sectarian circles was not confined to those who had become members of a particular sect. After all, sectarian scriptures, including those of the *Hongyang* jiao* and of Patriarch Luo were printed and widely distributed. And they did not present beliefs that were newly invented, but rather built on a stock of common notions with a long literary and oral history. There were certainly many people who had no personal interest in these matters and accordingly only a nebulous idea of sectarian teachings; but those who had an interest, that is, the potential converts, could and probably did know the basic creeds of this common sectarian tradition. In the sixteenth century they were not secret but public.

Becoming a member of a particular sectarian group did not mean to forsake all beliefs and ideas one previously had. To be sure, sect founders had to offer some distinctive elements, be it particular rituals or new symbols, to set their own teaching apart from other sects. To call one's own teaching *hongyang** (vast *yang*) instead of *hongyang* (red *yang*) could be part of this attempt to mark a difference. More important to establish the identity of a sect was the claim to possess unique scriptures revealed to its founder, who usually asserted to be the final manifestation of the eternal truth offering the only way to salvation in the latter days of this cosmic period. Such claims could invoke a certain commitment to a particular sectarian community, but they did not prevent sectarian teachings from mutually influencing each other and sharing a common base of beliefs and symbols. As has been shown in the case of the Luo tradition, sectarian boundaries were permeable not only for persons but also for ideas. Sectarian *baojuan* are not textbooks of theological dogmas describing comprehensive belief systems. We should rather regard most of them as presenting certain aspects of a religious world conception that comprised much more than what was written down in a single book. Having this in mind, we cannot be surprised that individual *baojuan* lay stress on different aspects and elaborate different symbols of this common tradition. In the context of literary history these differences are important to grasp their specific content and outlook. However, if we are to understand the beliefs prevailing in popular religious sects, we should not overstress the differences in literary works. Since they were written for an audience that had already some knowledge of the common beliefs, there was no reason to elaborate them always in great detail. Indeed, the more common certain beliefs were, the less it was necessary to emphasize them.

The common inventory of symbols and ideas left room for new combinations and mythological images, and allowed a sect leader to formulate his or her own variety of the ever recurrent teaching of salvation. In *Hongyang** scriptures the theme of meeting the Unborn Venerable Mother (*Wusheng Laomu*), which was widely known in the sectarian milieu, is taken up in the description of Piaogao's enlightenment when during a dream he sees the Unborn Venerable Mother.[233] But as the text continues, *Wusheng Laomu* is substituted by *Wusheng Fumu* (Unborn Parents), and then the enlightening experience is depicted with almost the same words as in Patriarch Luo's *Kugong wudao juan*.[234] What is changed are some details. Whereas Luo is illuminated by a white ray of light, in Piaogao's case it is a red light. And, of course, Patriarch Luo does not mention the Unborn Venerable Mother but his enlightenment occurs when during a dream Emptiness (*xukong*) is moved by his tearful longing for salvation. Thus, the *Hongyang** scripture draws from the available repertoire and combines the symbol of *Wusheng Laomu* with Luo's description of enlightenment. We can be sure that both were well-known topics with which most readers were in some way familiar.

The mutual penetration of beliefs and symbols of various traditions and the liberal substitution or combination of symbols from diverse contexts is a most significant feature in the development of popular religious movements. Lack of historical evidence precludes to trace this process prior to the emergence of *baojuan* literature. But it is clear that by the end of the sixteenth century this process of amalgamation was well under way. To explain its implications, let us consider how the belief in *Wusheng Laomu* was conciliated with the religious visions of Patriarch Luo in another *Hongyang** scripture, the *Hongyang* wudao mingxin* 弘陽悟道明心 (*Hongyang [Scripture] on Awakening to the Way and Enlightening the Mind*). In chapter six we find a depiction of the Unborn Venerable Mother in mythological images. She resides in a heavenly palace and sees the suffering of her children on earth. The faithful believers offer incense to beg for her help. Moved by their fate she descends to earth, and showing her compassion she emits a ray of light to illuminate her children.[235] In the opening lines of the following

[233] *Hongyang kugong wudao jing*, ch. 24, in *BJCJ*, vol. 15, p. 399.

[234] *Hongyang kugong wudao jing*, ch. 24 (*BJCJ*, vol. 15, pp. 400 f) compare with *Kugong wudao juan* (*BJCJ*, vol. 1, pp. 153 f).

[235] *Hongyang wudao mingxin*, ch. 6, in *BJCJ*, vol. 16, pp. 94–109.

chapter this motive is taken up: The compassion of the Venerable Mother has appeared in a red light. But then the symbol is suddenly replaced by another one: Emptiness (*xukong*):

> The true incense [offered by the faithful] has risen to Emptiness (*xukong*). It moved the Unborn Great Emptiness (*wusheng tai xukong* 無生太虛空). Showing great compassion it emitted with its transforming power a red light thoroughly illuminating with a tinkling.[236]

This again is an almost verbatim quotation from Luo Menghong's *Kugong wudao juan.*[237] In both cases, Emptiness is moved and displays compassion by emitting a light. There cannot be any doubt that the author of the *Hongyang* scripture knew Patriarch Luo's writings and that his own formulations are, as it were, interpretations of these texts in the context of his own understanding. Thus, this is a rare case where we can see of how Luo's writings were understood by those who read them. It is evident that in this case Luo's notion of Emptiness was identified with *Wusheng Laomu.* Or, what amounts to the same, *Wusheng Laomu* of popular beliefs was interpreted as being the same as Emptiness in Luo's writings. In any case, we can see how the interpretation of symbols depended on the specific sectarian context. There was no problem using Patriarch Luo's scriptures in a context where belief in *Wusheng Laomu* and the three cosmic periods was common. We must conclude, therefore, that the possession and use of certain scriptures alone says little about the actual beliefs of those who used them. The author of the *Hongyang** scriptures certainly did use Patriarch Luo's scriptures, but it would probably not be reasonable to say that the *Hongyang* jiao* was one of the "Luo sects".

Without doubt, the influence of the Luo tradition within the sectarian milieu was considerable, given alone the great distribution and popularity of Luo Menghong's scriptures. However, these scriptures and their teachings were processed in combination with other traditions deeply rooted in the same milieu. This is true even in cases where scholars are used to see a rather clear continuation of the Luo school, as with the *Zhaijiao* tradition in Zhejiang and Fujian, which considered Patriarch Luo as its founder. In the scriptures of this branch of the "Luo sects" we find such notions as *hunyuan* (chaos origin), *Wusheng*

[236] *Hongyang wudao mingxin,* ch. 7, in *BJCJ,* vol. 16, pp. 114 f.

[237] Cf. *Kugong wudao juan,* in *BJCJ,* vol. 1, p. 151.

Laomu, and the three *yang*, which are central in the *Hongyang* jiao*.[238] It is even stated that the sect originated in the *Hunyuan* line of transmission (*Hunyuan yi pai* 混元一派).[239] That there was some exchange of ideas between the tradition from which the *Hongyang* jiao* derived and the Luo tradition is confirmed in later scriptures of the *Zhaijiao* in Fujian, where we find reference to the *Hunyuan Laozu* (Venerable Patriarch Chaos Origin).[240] This all shows that the boundaries between various sectarian traditions were less sharp than the proud claim to represent the "orthodox" school of a famous sect founder suggests. It certainly is possible to distinguish individual sect lineages and organizations, but we must be aware that most of them partook in a common tradition of symbols and beliefs. Within the sectarian milieu there was a significant exchange of personnel and ideas, which led to an increasing homogenization of sectarian teachings. With the further development of the traditions founded in the sixteenth century, this process of mutual penetration increased. The ever growing number of different sect names easily obscures the fact that most of them represented varieties of a common tradition. To belong to a certain sect was important in terms of leadership structure and social networks, but for the average members differences in beliefs seem to have been of minor importance. The scriptures and teachings were complex enough for any community to choose those elements that fitted best its religious preferences. Depending on the circumstances, this allowed to emphasize different aspects of the tradition. As we shall see in the case of the *Hongyang* jiao*, this made it even possible to turn a basically conservative sectarian tradition into a millenarian movement engaged in rebellion.

The Hongyang jiao during the Qing dynasty*

Han Taihu, alias Piaogao, died in 1598 after only four years of successful teaching in Peking. He had gained the support of influential patrons at the court who supported the printing of *Hongyang** scriptures in the imperial publishing office. Although during the Wanli era (1573–1619) government policy gradually shifted towards a more repressive course

[238] Cf. *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 22b (for *hunyuan*), 29a-31a (for *Wusheng Laomu* and the three cosmic periods).

[239] *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 2, 1b.

[240] Preface to the *Keyi baojuan*, in *MJZJ*, vol. 6, p. 393a. The scripture dates back to the seventeenth century since the preface was written by Lord Tang 湯公, who was a disciple of Yao Wenyu's (cf. *Sanshi yinyou, j.* 3, 21a).

against popular religious sects,[241] the *Hongyang* jiao* seems to have been sufficiently safe to continue its activities after Piaogao's death. Even after the *Wenxiang jiao* 聞香教 rebellion in 1622, which sharpened the government's awareness of the potential dangers engendered by sects, the *Hongyang* jiao* went on to produce and print new scriptures.[242] It does not seem to have been the target of any repressive measures during the Ming dynasty. However, only two years after the establishment of the Qing dynasty in 1644, the *Hunyuan jiao* 混元教 (Chaos Origin Teaching) was explicitly mentioned in a memorial suggesting the suppression of sectarian groups.[243] *Hongyang*† *jiao* 洪陽教 (Huge Yang Teaching) and *Hunyuan jiao* were also listed in the *Legal Code of the Qing Dynasty* among the sects whose activities were forbidden,[244] and the same sects are again mentioned in an implementing regulation of 1673.[245] This shows that the *Hongyang* jiao* continued into the Qing dynasty and was active enough to attract the attention of the authorities.

The laws banning the activities of heterodox sects, which the Qing government took over from the Ming, do not seem to have been strictly applied during the first century of Manchu rule. It is not before the reign of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1795) that we find systematic investigation and harsh punishments. Incidentally, it was a case in which the *Hongyang jiao*[246] was involved that set the standards for punishments. The *Qing shilu* 清實錄 (*Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty*) reports that in 1745 a *Hongyang jiao* was discovered in the Tongzhou region in the vicinity of the capital. In the following year, after further investigation, two high officials reported to the throne that in this

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[241] Already in 1587 the activities of the *Bailian jiao, Wuwei jiao* and *Luojiao* in Hebei, Shandong and Henan were considered a potential threat and forbidden (*Ming shilu, Shenzong shilu, j.* 182, 2b/3a). Ten years later, in 1597, Lü Kun 呂坤 memorialized mentioning the dangerous influence of heterodox teachings, which he regarded as one of the sources of rebellion (*Mingshi* 明史, *j.* 226, p. 5937).

[242] Such as the *Hongyang houxu randeng tianhua baojuan* 弘陽後續燃燈天華寶卷 (*Precious Scroll of the Celestial Flower Continuing the Transmission of the Hongyang [Teaching]*), which was published in 1628. For this scripture see Overmyer, *Precious Volumes*, pp. 336–338. It is reproduced in *MJZJ*, vol. 6, pp. 749–772.

[243] *Donghua lu, Shunzhi* 3 (1646), sixth month (p. 7b). The other sects mentioned are *Bailian, Dacheng* 大成 and *Wuwei jiao*.

[244] *Da Qing huidian* 大清會典, *j.* 55, quoted in De Groot, *Sectarianism*, p. 153.

[245] *Da Qing huidian shili, j.* 390, quoted in De Groot, *Sectarianism*, pp. 153 f.

[246] Since the Qianlong era, *hongyang*# 宏陽 was usually written *hongyang* 紅陽 to avoid the character *hong** 宏, which was part of the personal name of the Qianlong emperor and hence taboo.

remote region 113 popular temples had been found, which were called *Sanjiao tang* 三教堂 (Three Teachings Halls). Since these temples were used by members of heretical sects, the officials proposed to convert them into public houses for the poor (*puji tang* 普濟堂) and in this way supersede the sects.[247]

This proposal suggests that the two officials were aware that the temples had an important social function and could not easily be eliminated without a substitute. In this remote area, where government presence was weak, they seem to have served as community centres. The great number of temples found shows that the sects had a considerable following among the populace. As in other cases, the sect members probably supported each other in case of distress and in this way functioned as mutual help associations. It should be noted that the temples did not all belong to the same sect. Besides the *Hongyang jiao* there were other sects, such as the *Wuwei jiao*.[248] However, all temples were commonly called Three Teachings Halls, which seems to indicate that the different sects were taken as belonging to a common tradition and possibly cooperated in some way. Unfortunately, the sources do not give us more detailed information about the sects' activities.

What is clear, however, is that the only crime was offending the law that forbade the formation of heretical sects. No other illegal activities were found. There is no indication of an attempted rebellion or other political activities. Nevertheless, the emperor seemed to have been greatly upset by these sects with a large following of poor peasants in the vicinity of his capital. He sent a member of the inner government, the Grand Secretary Naquin 納親, to lead the investigations. The punishments proposed by him were personally sanctioned by the emperor. They categorized the culprits into four classes: The leaders were sentenced to death by strangulation. The active members of the *Hongyang jiao*, who had spread the teachings, were exiled to Urumqi and enslaved. Those who had not propagated the teaching but participated in the religious activities were deported to far away frontiers. The fourth class were people who were not members of the sect, but had prayed in the temples or recited scriptures without any other illegal activity.

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[247] *JJCLFZZ*, Qianlong 11/9/3 (1749), memorial by the Governor General of Zhili and the Prefect of Shuntian 順天, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 525.

[248] Ma/Han, p. 526.

They were sentenced to a hundred strokes with a heavy stick. It was also decreed that all scriptures and images should be destroyed.[249]

This graduation of punishments, which was sanctioned by the emperor, became the rule and was usually applied in later cases. This meant that the leaders of popular sects had to face the death penalty, and even ordinary members were exiled. This made sect membership rather unattractive, and we may suppose that many people had second thoughts before joining a popular religious sect. Harsh punishments certainly had the intended effects of destroying existing sect organizations and making it more difficult to find new converts. While these measures seriously impeded the unrestricted propagation and growth of sectarian movements, they did not succeed in completely eradicating them at the grass-roots. It took some time before a new leadership emerged, and what followed resembles in some way a cyclical process of persecution and reorganization of sectarian groups. The *Hongyang jiao* in Tongzhou region is an instructive example for this development.

After the persecution of 1746, sect activities seem to have disappeared for some time, which means that the remaining members ceased to act publicly and probably stopped proselytizing. As government pressure gradually decreased, some former members resumed their religious practices and started again to gain new converts. When in 1769, more than twenty years after the first persecution, the government ordered a new investigation to find out if there were any remnants of the sect left, the suspicion was confirmed. It was not too difficult for officials to get on the right track since they had lists of former sect members and naturally first inquired in families connected with them. Thus, they found that some descendants of sentenced sectarians had resumed their fathers' religious activities and propagated the *Hongyang jiao*. Their confessions, which were reported to the throne, give us valuable insight into the motives that induced people to participate in sectarian activities:

> The grandfather of Sang Wenzhi 桑文之, Sang Zilei 桑自雷, who was an imperial bondservant of the Plain Yellow Banner and a regular Chinese soldier, had since long been a member of the *Hongyang jiao*. His son Sang Jinkui 桑進魁 had also been a member of this sect. Later, because the sect was disbanded after the persecution, the scriptures were dispersed and he himself died. In the year Qianlong 23 (1758), it happened that in Sang Wenzhi's family many things went wrong, and because of this they remembered that during the time when his grandfather was still alive and

[249] Ma/Han, p. 526.

> they used to offer to the buddha and to recite scriptures, there was no misfortune at all. Therefore, he and some of the sons and grandsons of his grandfather's fellow members [following nine names], altogether ten persons, resumed the old rules. Every year on the sixteenth day of the fifth month and on the sixteenth day of the eleventh month, the dates of the birth and death of [the founder of] the *Hongyang jiao*, they all contributed some money of hundred cash, made offerings and recited scriptures, and took turns in organizing an assembly to pray for well-being.[250]

We may doubt that the sect activities were confined to merely two days of the year. It seems plausible, however, that about ten years after the prosecution government pressure had become less intense, which encouraged believers to continue the former practices in private. Obviously, sect membership comprised whole families and was part of their family traditions. There is no detailed information about their beliefs. They recited the scriptures of the sect to avert misfortune and secure the well-being of their families. This were quite concrete goals that did not differ significantly from the motives to practise other forms of popular religion. The memorial continues describing another case:

> In Zhuo 涿 county there was Bao Yizong 包義宗. His deceased father Bao Wenyu 包文玉 and his fellow villagers Zheng Qilong 鄭起龍 and Bao San 鮑三 had formerly been members of the *Hongyang jiao*. In the years following the persecution of 1746 Zheng Qilong and the others died. In the year Qianlong 19 (1754), because Bao Yizong's mother, née Dong 董, had become seriously ill, he remembered the tradition of the *Hongyang jiao* to offer tea leaves to the buddha and to pray for the cure of illness. Following this practice, he offered tea leaves to [the statue of] Guanyin Buddha (*Guanyin fo*) in his house and also gave some to his mother to eat, and the illness was accordingly healed. Thereafter, he recollected the scriptures, which after the ban had been saved in the great temple (*da si* 大寺) of the village, to recite them. He also practised healing for other people. Soon afterwards the mother of Huo Zhenshan 霍振山, née Dong, from Liangxiang 良鄉 county fell ill, and Bao Yizong healed her with tea leaves. Huo Zhenshan therefore venerated Bao Yizong as teacher and received some scriptures. […] During the years Qianlong 29, 31 and 32 (1764, 1766, 1767) Li Shiquan 李士勸 and Yao Lin 姚林 from Liangxiang, Zhang San 張三, a Chinese soldier of the Plain White Banner, and the commoner Wang Lao 王老 from Zhuo entered the community

[250] *ZPZZ*, Qianlong 34/2/12 (1769), memorial by the Governor General of Zhili Yang Tingzhang 楊廷璋, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 527.

> after they had been successfully healed, because they wanted to avert misfortune and obtain blessings (*xiao zai jiang fu* 消災降福).[251]

The case is an instructive illustration of how a sectarian tradition reappeared after persecution by the government. While the leadership structure seems to have been more or less destroyed through executions and exiles, the tradition was rooted deeply enough to be remembered and taken up again when the circumstances allowed it. The destruction of scriptures had not been complete since some of them had been hidden in the local temple. Those who resumed sect activities were usually descendants of former members who had been socialized within the sectarian tradition. There is no information about sect networks extending beyond the local communities, but we may assume that before long former connections with other sectarian groups would have been re-established.

We observe that after the persecution membership in the newly formed groups was rather small and probably knowledge of the more subtle elements of the sect's teachings was limited. Such conditions certainly reinforced existing tendencies to neglect the peculiarities of particular traditions and to rely more on the commonly known beliefs shared by most of them. New members do not seem to have been attracted by sectarian teachings in the first place but rather by their ritual practices, of which healing rituals were particularly important. Under such conditions scriptures were probably needed more for ritual purposes than as means of spiritual instruction. That their ritual function was more important than their particular contents reveals from another account of the same memorial:

> In Fangshan 房山 [we arrested] Qi Si 齊四, son of the deceased Qi Rusin 齊如信, who is also a member of the *Hongyang jiao.* After the ban of Qianlong 11 (1746), the sectarian community was disbanded. If there was a death in the neighbourhood among poor people who cannot afford to engage Buddhist monks or Daoist priests, they asked this and other criminals to recite scriptures and perform the burial. The money that these criminals got [for their services] they shared.[252]

Members of the *Hongyang jiao* thus served in similar function as Buddhist and Daoist monks and priests. They performed rituals to secure well-being and rituals for the death. This seems to have been a general

[251] Ma/Han, p. 527.

[252] Ma/Han., p. 528.

practice, as is confirmed by other cases. In 1783 an aged member of the *Hongyang jiao* in Shanxi confessed that after the persecution of 1746 he had abandoned practising the sect's rituals. However, some years ago, because he was old and could not labour any more, he revived the *Hongyang jiao* and performed rituals for the protection against calamities and the curing of illness. In this way he earned some money. He then founded a congregation and they regularly recited scriptures. He made his living by healing through acupuncture and finally had more than ten disciples.[253]

These activities did not differ much from what thousands of popular healers, members of *sūtra*-reciting communities or Buddhist and Daoist priests practised. Nothing is said about heterodox teachings promoted by the sectarians. Quite the contrary; when the officials scrutinized the scriptures confiscated in 1769, they found books commonly used by monks and priests. There were also "some old printed books that contained exhortations to do the good in coarse language, but they definitely did not contain any heterodox sentences."[254] Of course, this only shows that the officials did not discover any sectarian writings, which may have been brought to a safe place before. We may conclude, however, that particular teachings were not the reason for the persecution and the punishments but the mere fact that these people had organized an illegal religious community. The name *Hongyang jiao* had been listed among the banned sects since the beginning of the dynasty, and after the sect had been persecuted in several provinces in 1746, government repression was routine. The government, including the emperor, seems to have developed the illusionary idea of completely eradicating sects such as the *Hongyang jiao*.

That this attempt was illusionary is not only revealed by later history. The official investigations showed that it was impossible to discontinue popular religious traditions without exterminating whole families. While organizations could be destroyed and activities suppressed for some time, there was no way to change completely the social milieu in which the sects developed. In the social context where these *Hongyang* groups were active, they responded to the needs of some people who barely had many alternatives. Those who could not

[253] *ZPZZ*, Qianlong 49 (1774), memorial by the Governor of Shanxi Nong Qi 農起, quoted in Ma/Han, pp. 528 f.

[254] *ZPZZ*, Qianlong 34/2/13 (1769), memorial by Yang Tiangzhang, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 528.

afford regular monks and priests for their burials had to turn to other practitioners. Those who were ill and had no doctor needed some kind of cure. And if a spiritual healer was successful it was just a small step to attract disciples and become the head of a sect-like community. These were structures that could not be suppressed by force. And since these structures were ubiquitous, there was always a fertile ground where sectarian traditions could develop.

The *Hongyang jiao* was not the only sect growing on this ground. As we have seen, various sectarian groups were discovered in the Tongzhou region in 1746. While they differed from each other in belonging to different sectarian lineages and probably also in certain practices, they nevertheless were close enough to cooperate with each other on some occasions. In the early years of the nineteenth century groups belonging to the *Hongyang jiao* became part of a large sectarian network comprising a variety of traditions. This network was organized by Lin Qing 林清, who was a leader of the *Bagua* (Eight Trigrams) tradition, in preparation for a rebellion. By 1813 Lin Qing had united various sectarian groups in the provinces Zhili, Henan, and Shandong, and started the "great affair," which culminated in a direct attack on the Imperial Palace in Peking. While only a small number of rebels intruded the Forbidden City, more than hundred thousand people were involved in the provinces.[255] This attack on the centre of power confirmed the worst apprehensions the government had of popular sectarian movements. Although the rebellion was crushed after three months, it shocked the emperor who judged it as being without precedent in any former dynasty.

The *Hongyang jiao* had its strongholds in Zhili and the neighbouring provinces, the same region where it had been active since the Ming dynasty. And just as in the early days it had members not only in the capital but even among the imperial entourage. One of the *Hongyang* groups was headed by Liu Xingli 劉興裡, a man in his eighties from Majuqiao 馬駒橋 in Tongzhou district, which borders the capital in the East. He had gained a reputation as a healer of illness and attracted a large following of disciples who had joined his sect after having been cured. As in the time of Piaogao, some members of the *Hongyang jiao* were closely related to the imperial administration. Among them were Manchu and Chinese bannermen and eunuchs working in offices of

[255] Susan Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China. The Eight Trigrams uprising of 1813*, New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1976, pp. 341–343.

the Imperial Household.[256] These eunuchs played a major part in the attack on the Forbidden City, since it was they who opened the gates for the rebels to enter. Thus, *Hongyang jiao* groups were deeply involved into the rebellion. Accordingly, persecution was severe during the following decades. Both the Jiaqing and the Daoguang emperors took these matters very seriously and personally ordered meticulous investigations to completely eradicate the *Hongyang jiao.*[257]

The sect founded by Piaogao had a history of more than two hundred years without being involved in any rebellion. Its members acted as religious practitioners who offered ritual services in a similar way as Buddhist monks and Daoist priests. Much of their success in gaining converts and establishing a net of sectarian communities in Zhili and other provinces in northern China was due to the skill of their leaders at healing sickness. To be healed was an important motive to turn to sects such as the *Hongyang jiao*, and successful cure certainly gave their teachings a great deal of trustworthiness. The members revered the founding patriarch Piaogao, and when they recited his scriptures they read nothing that could have been considered revolutionary or subversive. And yet, in 1813 *Hongyang* groups were among the core units of one of the most violent rebellions during the Qing dynasty. This is indeed a remarkable turn in the history of a sect that started as a rather conservative religious movement.

There were a number of factors contributing to this development. One of them was the dynamics of interaction between government policy and sectarian response. From the middle of the eighteenth century on, the *Hongyang jiao* was subjected to persecution. Although the government did not find any subversive activities or teachings, it saw the sect as a political hazard that had to be suppressed by all means available. Given this climate of mistrust and enmity, it was difficult for sect members not to perceive the state power as suppressive and hostile. This certainly paved the way for a more radical interpretation of sectarian teachings. Since the *Hongyang jiao* was part of the sectarian milieu in northern China where a common tradition of sectarian teachings was shared by members of diverse groups, it was not difficult to be responsive to the millenarian hopes propagated by Lin Qing in his attempt to organize a rebel force. After all, belief in the end of the present *kalpa* and the advent of Maitreya as ruler of the White Yang period was part

[256] For details cf. Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion*, pp. 67–70.

[257] Ma/Han, pp. 532–535, 540–548.

of the *Hongyang* teaching since its beginning. And the threatening destruction accompanying the end of the present *kalpa* formed the background of its promise of salvation. Only the faithful members of the sect would escape the final catastrophe. However, it does not seem that this catastrophe was expected in the immediate future by members of the *Hongyang jiao*. To return to the original home and meet the Eternal Mother—whatever this meant to the individual believer—was not bound to the end of the present *kalpa*, which eventually would occur. Individual salvation could be reached after a faithful life practising the rituals of the *Hongyang jiao.* Thus, millenarian expectations were not prominent in the *Hongyang* tradition, but they were part of the repertory of latent beliefs and symbols that could be activated under certain conditions.

What exactly the necessary conditions were that transformed latent into intense millenarianism is difficult to ascertain. In the years preceding the rebellion, natural disasters, floods and droughts, which led to a severe famine in the northern provinces, may have engendered an atmosphere of impending catastrophes.[258] In any case, bad economic conditions and suffering of large parts of the population that were struggling to survive did certainly not improve the legitimation of a notoriously repressive government. The idea of cyclic changes of the Heavenly Mandate was more than an abstract political theory of the elites, it belonged to the common stock of beliefs.[259] These diffuse ideas of cyclic changes were structurally similar to sectarian beliefs in *kalpa* cycles and both sets of symbols sustained the same moods and expectations. There were, of course, other clusters of symbols and convictions that counteracted the expectation and promotion of revolutionary change. Obedience, order, peace, and harmony were values encouraged not only by the official ideology, they were also supported in the scriptures of the *Hongyang jiao* and many other sectarian traditions.[260]

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[258] Cf. Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion,* p. 111.

[259] For a discussion of imperial legitimation in popular culture see Barend J. ter Haar, *Ritual and mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an identity* (Sinica Leidensia; 43), Leiden: Brill, 1998, pp. 306–324.

[260] That the social ethics in most sectarian writings do not significantly depart from conventional morality has been shown by Overmyer, *Precious volumes,* pp. 206–215; cf. also Daniel Overmyer, "Values in Chinese sectarian literature: Ming and Ch'ing pao-chüan," in *Popular culture in late imperial China*, edited by David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn Rawski (Studies on China; 4), Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1985, pp. 219–254.

The common sectarian tradition sustained both moods cherishing stability and moods expecting change. Which mood prevailed depended on additional factors. Moods and motivations without doubt are supported by the available symbol systems,[261] but they are also influenced by actual experiences. Thus, the experience of distress and suppression certainly fostered a desire for betterment and hence for change. Under these circumstances the message of a catastrophic end of the present condition, which at the same time promised promotion and prosperity to those who support the right case, reinforced prevailing emotional dispositions. It was easily believed because it was a message one would like to believe. And it was easy to believe it, because it was not a completely new and unheard-of message, but corresponded to the ideas that were part of the common belief system.

This may help to understand why the millenarian interpretation of the sectarian tradition occasionally met a receptive audience. But even if we consider that the deterioration of social and economic conditions had reached a first climax in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, we must admit that this alone does not explain the dynamics of the *Bagua* rebellion in 1813. To build a huge sectarian network extending over several provinces and to mobilize it for political action demanded more than an audience receptive to millenarian teachings. It required a politically ambitious leadership capable to organize and motivate sectarian groups of various traditions. Susan Naquin has reconstructed this aspect of the 1813 rebellion in great detail.[262] The political dynamics of sectarian groups such as the *Hongyang jiao* was the result of a complex texture of latent beliefs, government repression, economic crisis, and personal ambitions of individual leaders. Since the occurrence and interaction of these factors was hardly predictable, the government was not wholly unjustified in considering popular religious sects a potential threat to the stability of its rule.

[261] For the role of religious symbol systems in sustaining moods and motivations see Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a cultural system," in *Anthropological approaches to the study of religion*, edited by Michael Banton (A.S.A. Monographs; 3), London: Tavistock Publications, 1966, pp. 1–46.

[262] Cf. Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China,* chapter 2.

4. Sanyi Jiao (Three-in-One Teaching)

Most popular religious sects we have considered so far originated in north China. Luo Menghong, who was a native of Shandong province, spent most of his life in the vicinity of Peking. Li Bin, alias Puming, the founder of the *Huangtian jiao*, was born in western Zhili, while the home of Han Taihu, alias Piaogao, was in southern Zhili. With the exception of the *Luo jiao*, which soon spread to the South, the centres of these sectarian traditions remained in the northern regions. This certainly contributed to the process of increasing amalgamation of sectarian traditions. Although Patriarch Luo presented his teachings primarily as based on the Buddhist tradition, whereas the *Huangtian jiao* and the *Hongyang jiao* were closer to Daoism, they all were part of the popular religious culture of the North and in many ways interacted with each other. The situation is quite different when we turn to the *Sanyi jiao* 三一教 (Three-in-One Teaching), which was founded in the middle of the sixteenth century by Lin Zhao'en 林兆恩.

Lin Zhao'en died in 1598, the same year as Piaogao, the founder of the *Hongyang jiao*. However, in most other respects his biography is in complete contrast to the sect founders in north China. He was born in 1517 in the southern province of Fujian in the coastal region of Putian 莆田. His family background was upper class, among his ancestors and relatives were many high officials and scholars, and since his youth he was a respected member of the local community. Being an outstanding student he started the usual career for a son of an influential family and passed the first of the civil examinations at the age of eighteen in 1534. Although he failed the higher exams and finally forsook the career of an official to become a religious and philosophical teacher, he remained rooted in the milieu of gentry and scholars. Thus, the social background of the emerging *Sanyi jiao* differed considerably from the other sects founded in the same century. The starting point of Lin Zhao'en's teachings was neither Buddhism nor Daoism, but Confucianism. He presented his teachings not in the symbolic language of popular religious traditions but in the language of the educated members of the intellectual elites. While his fame was mostly due to his success as a teacher, his social status and material fortune did not depend on his position as a sect leader. Given all these differences it is not surprising that Lin Zhao'en's teachings show little influence of the popular religious traditions surfacing in the *baojuan* literature of

other sects. Although further development of the *Sanyi jiao* brought some changes by adding many elements of the local religious culture to *Sanyi jiao* teachings and practices, it does not seem to have been integrated into the networks of other sectarian groups. Hence the *Sanyi jiao* holds a somewhat marginal position within the spectrum of popular religious movements.

Lin Zhao'en, founder of the Sanyi jiao

Lin Zhao'en's biography can be summarized as the life of a promising young student and member of an influential local clan who after a period of personal setbacks became a religious seeker and finally a teacher and head of a growing community.[263] His spiritual development started on the solid base of his Confucian education. After he had failed the higher examinations, he rejected striving for an official career and sought instruction from Daoist and Buddhist masters. None of these teachings satisfied him, and it was only after a mysterious encounter with an "enlightened teacher" (*ming shi* 明師) that he found a true understanding of human nature and destiny. This enlightened teacher, whose name was never revealed, instructed him about the Four Books and Five Canonical Scriptures (*sishu wujing* 四書五經), which were the very base of Lin Zhao'en's Confucian education. He explained to him that "from the times of Confucius and Mencius these books were obscured through commentaries and interpretations and were not understood up to the present day."[264] The implications of this insight were far-reaching for it allowed Lin Zhao'en to reject the official interpretation of the Confucian tradition based on Zhu Xi 朱熹, which was the standard in government examinations where he had been so unsuccessful. At the same time he could present his own teaching as the true understanding of the Confucian heritage. While he continued to rely strongly on Confucianist thoughts and symbols he freed himself from

[263] For the biography and hagiography of Lin Zhao'en cf. Judith A. Berling, *The syncretic religion of Lin Chao-en*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, pp. 62–84; Kenneth Dean, *Lord of the Three in One: The spread of a cult in southeast China*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998, pp. 62–95. Other book-length studies of Lin Zhao'en and the *Sanyi jiao* are Zheng Zhiming 鄭志明, *Mingdai Sanyi jiaozhu yanjiu* 明代三一教主研究, Taibei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1988, and Ma/Han, pp. 719–858.

[264] *Xin sheng zhi zhi* 心聖直指, by Lin Zhao'en, in *Lin zi sanjiao zhengzong tonglun* 林子三教正宗統論, vol. 3, 13b. I have used an edition, bound in 12 volumes and published in 1988 in Putian as a facsimile of earlier editions. It was kindly provided to me by Ma Xisha.

the rigidity of Confucian orthodoxy. The central concept of his own understanding of human nature and the whole cosmos became the mind (*xin* 心), which brought his thinking closer to the deviant school of Wang Yangming 王陽明. Lin was not primarily interested in abstract philosophy, but in the practical aspects of self-cultivation, which for him was the cultivation of the mind. He developed a particular method which he called *Kongmen xinfa* 孔門心法 (mind method of the Confucian school) and which became the basis of his instruction.

In 1551, at the age of thirty-five, he accepted his first disciples. To prove the effectiveness of his mind method he used it to cure sickness. Since he was successful in healing, the number of his disciples increased. To regulate their deportment and course of study he wrote rules providing a detailed program of study based on a Confucian concept of education. Thus he became the head of a private school. His position within the local community rose considerably during the years 1556 to 1563 when the Putian region was repeatedly invaded by pirate and bandit raids. In this situation of material and spiritual suffering, Lin gained stature as a leader of the local gentry who resolutely responded to the challenges of this crisis. He used part of his family's large fortune to care for the poor and suffering and to bury the countless victims of the pirate raids. He also cared for the spiritual needs of the deceased, composing funerary documents and offering sacrifices to the spirits of the dead. These events elevated Lin Zhao'en's position within the local community, but also changed his role as teacher. The model of the Confucian teacher was superseded by the role of a religious master who preached his own vision of the Three Teachings. After 1563 the number of his followers increased and his fame spread beyond Putian. He travelled around in Fujian and the neighbouring regions giving lectures and organizing his growing community. During these years his literary work increased considerably, his writings and records of his instructions were printed and distributed by his disciples who spread his teaching to other provinces. When Lin Zhao'en died in 1598, more than ten thousand people came to mourn. By then, Lin Zhao'en had already been transformed into a divine sage who appeared in the world to show the way to perfection through the cultivation of the mind.

Lin Zhao'en's personality and career have many facets. There is the Confucian scholar and teacher who, though not holding an advanced degree, instructed his disciples in Confucian virtues and thinking and

wrote elaborate commentaries on the canonical scriptures. There is also the respected communal leader who energetically and selflessly organized relief measures in times of crisis and social disturbance. And there is the religious master and sect founder who was convinced of having uncovered the hidden meaning and truth of the Three Teachings and whose followers worshipped him like a saint or god in temples. We cannot deal with this outstanding and multi-faceted personality in detail, but shall concentrate on his role as sect founder. We shall find that in this role he shared some traits with other sect founders although his social background was completely different.

Before Lin started his public career as a teacher he went through a period of spiritual searching. In this he followed the common role pattern in seeking instruction from various masters. The crucial experience was his encounter with the unnamed "enlightened teacher" in 1546 who not only explained to him the true meaning of the Confucian writings but also encouraged him to teach his method of cultivation. Since he did not hold an advanced degree, he could not claim the authority of a scholar. The enlightened master, whom Lin may have met in a dream or a vision, told him: "You wear the dress of a commoner [i.e., you do not have the status of a scholar]. If you do not have the means to prove [your method] who will follow and believe you?" And he continued recommending: "Prove it with illness. If you heal illness, men will believe in it."[265] Thus, a new role was offered to Lin Zhao'en, which demanded other kinds of credentials than that of a Confucian scholar. Before he fully accepted the new role, he met Zhuo Wanchun 桌晚春, an eccentric Daoist with whom he befriended. Zhuo Wanchun represented the type of individual Daoist who had withdrawn from the world, acting as diviner and miracle worker. He probably introduced Lin Zhao'en into the practice of inner alchemy. Lin slowly entered a new cultural milieu that made it easier for him to adopt his new role of a religious teacher. After he had accepted his first disciple in 1551 he decided to prove the efficiency of his method of mind cultivation by curing illness. "The root of all illness is the mind. If the mind is sick then the body will be sick."[266] While the ideological background of his healing activities remained to be dominated by the symbolism of the

[265] *Xin sheng zhi zhi,* 13b.

[266] *Lin zi benxing shilu* 林子本行實錄, p. 24. I have used an edition with simplified characters published in 1982. No place given. The copy was kindly provided by Ma Xisha.

Confucian tradition, his social role approached the pattern of popular religious leaders who attract followers with their healing skills. When his movement later spread to other parts of China, the desire for better health was still the most important motive of new converts to join it.

In the following decades Lin Zhao'en gradually developed his method of mind cultivation and elaborated it to a system of nine stages.[267] The system is derived from Daoist practices of inner alchemy including circulation of the various energies within the microcosm of the body and visualizations of light and transcendental beings.[268] Though the details of his practice of cultivation and particularly its philosophical superstructure were Lin Zhao'en's genuine products, its general aims and methods were within the realm of common traditions. The record of his biography does not hide the influence of Daoism on his cultivation practice. It reports that he contacted the famous Daoist Zhang Sanfeng[269] 張三峰 to seek instruction after he had had a strange experience during his meditation practice.[270] Although this Zhang Sanfeng probably did not represent an orthodox branch of Daoism, contact with him can still be considered to be part of Lin's intercourse with the Three Teachings. However, during the last years of his life the conviction of his mission took traits that brought him very close to the founders of other popular religious sects as he identified himself with Maitreya:

> In the first month of the 16th year of the Wanli era [1588] he ordered the *Mile zunfo jing* 彌勒尊佛經 (Scripture on the Venerable Buddha Maitreya) to be printed since this was the time when Buddha Maitreya would take command of the world. Formerly, when the Lord had been staying at the Bamboo Ridge Monastery, Maitreya Buddha had personally appeared before the Lord and asked him to write this scripture. The Lord let fly the brush and completed it. The concluding *gāthā* goes: 'Maitreya Buddha is

[267] For a detailed description of the nine stages see Berling, *The syncretic religion of Lin Chao-en*, pp. 145–194.

[268] For the influence of Daoist inner alchemy see Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, pp. 141–148. Dean also reproduces illustrations showing the alchemical body and different stages of the cultivation process.

[269] For legends about Zhang Sanfeng cf. Anna Seidel, "A Taoist immortal of the Ming dynasty: Chang San-feng," in *Self and society in Ming thought*, edited by William T. DeBary, New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1970, pp. 483–531. Since the "real" Zhang Sanfeng lived during the Yuan and early Ming dynasties, the person whom Lin Zhao'en met must have been an impostor.

[270] *Lin zi benxing shilu*, pp. 71 f.

> my body. Maitreya Buddha is my mind. My body is Maitreya's body, my mind is Maitreya's mind. Maitreya and I are not two different bodies, Maitreya and I are not two different minds.' Only then did his disciples realize that the Lord was in fact truly manifested as Maitreya and that the Great Dragon-Flower Assembly (*Longhua hui*) was no empty talk.[271]

Given the context of Lin Zhao'en's philosophy, it is doubtful whether his declaring identity with Maitreya's body and mind should be understood literally. It more probably reflects his understanding of the fundamental unity of the whole cosmos and all beings, which denies any differentiation.[272] But as so often there are different levels of interpretation and at least his disciples considered the master to be a manifestation of Maitreya.[273] It seems that there were certain expectations to the role of a sect founder and being identified with Maitreya was a common pattern. In the eyes of his followers Lin Zhao'en was transformed from a human teacher to a world saviour and a manifestation of cosmic principles. Thus, his community gradually developed beliefs and expectations similar to those in the more popular sectarian milieus. Lin Zhao'en could not remain unaffected by the worship rendered to him by his disciples and in the last phase of his life accepted the role they expected of him. He saw himself as the one who has fully revealed the unity of the Three Teachings of Confucius, Laozi, and Śākyamuni to save the world. He was the Lord of Three-in-One Teaching (*Sanyi jiaozhu* 三一教主) whose image was worshipped in heaven by the Jade Emperor.[274] The internalization of his role as a world saviour and divine manifestation is apparent in a vision he had in 1590. It was declared to him that he was the one prophesied by Śākyamuni Buddha as the future saviour of the world who in the present time will restore the "true *yang*" and rebuild the universe.[275] He thus saw himself as

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[271] *Lin zi benxing shilu,* p. 100, translation by Dean, *Lord of the Three in One,* p. 86, slightly modified.

[272] This is the theme of the *Wusheng pian* 無生篇 (On no-birth), which was written two years earlier. There we read: "The Great Void (*taixu* 太虛) is me and moreover the whole cosmos (lit.: heaven and earth). The whole cosmos is me and moreover all beings." *Lin zi sanjiao zhenzong zonglun,* Putian, 1988, vol. 11, 63b.

[273] The recorded biography states that already in 1585 "Śākyamuni Buddha descended from the void and handed the power of control to the Lord of the Teaching" (*Lin zi benxing shilu,* p. 91). This is an obvious identification with Maitreya.

[274] *Lin zi benxing shilu,* pp. 99 f. Cf. Dean, *Lord of the Three in One,* p. 86 for a translation of this passage.

[275] *Lin zi benxing shilu,* pp. 140 f. Cf. Dean, *Lord of the Three in One,* p. 87. The "true

Maitreya and inaugurator of a new cosmic period. So penetrating was the common tradition of popular religion that it developed its dynamism even in a community that started and in many other respects remained in a cultural milieu dominated by Confucian values and scholarship.

These internal dynamics of the sect's development became evident even during Lin Zhao'en's lifetime. The main factor was certainly the tremendous increase in his following towards the end of his life. According to his recorded biography his disciples started in 1584 to build shrines,[276] which were called *Sanjiao tang* 三教堂 (Three Teachings Halls).[277] They also began to worship him as Xiawuni 夏午尼 to indicate that his position was equal to Confucius, Laozi, and Śākyamuni.[278] The number of visitors who came to pay reverence to the master swelled to such a degree that two years later he advised his disciples to build a large compound including a dormitory and a preaching hall.[279] While his religious development and practice of cultivation proceeded, he organized an extending community of followers, preached, travelled, and continued his literary activities. In 1594 he ordered his main disciple Lu Wenhui 盧文輝 to collect and edit his writings in two collections.[280] In the night when this work was finished a light appeared and the Goddess of the North Star (*Doumu* 斗母) descended from heaven. Lin Zhao'en and his disciple duly honoured the goddess as an auspicious omen exalting the completion of the collections to an event of cosmic dimensions.[281] Thus, the Three-in-One Teaching was firmly established as a well organized sect with canonical collections of the writings and instructions of its master when Lin passed away four years later at the age of eighty-one.

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yang" may refer to the three *kalpas*, which in popular sects were called *qingyang*, *hongyang* and *baiyang*.

[276] *Lin zi benxing shilu*, p. 77. The source lists forty shrines built until 1637, but adds that there were many others that could not be listed in detail (p. 79).

[277] *Lin zi benxing shilu*, p. 84.

[278] *Lin zi benxing shilu*, p. 48. For an explanation of the name Xiawuni see Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, p. 14, note 13. The name parallels the names of Confucius (Zhongni 仲尼), Laozi (Qingni 清尼) and Śākyamuni ([Shijia]mouni 釋迦牟尼) with the character *ni*; cf. *Lin zi benxing shilu*, pp. 99 f.

[279] *Lin zi benxing shilu*, p. 96.

[280] The two collections are *Lin zi sanjiao zhengzong tonglun* 林子三教正宗統論 (Orthodox collection of Master Lin's discussions about the Three in One teaching) in thirty-six books and *Sanyi jiaozhu Xiawuni jing* 三一教主夏午尼經 (Scriptures of Xiawuni, the Lord of the Three in One Teaching) in twelve books of thirty-six *juan*.

[281] *Lin zi benxing shilu*, pp. 147–150.

As founder of a popular religious movement Lin Zhao'en is in many ways exceptional. None of the other sect founders matches him in education and scholarship and none had a similar social background. Belonging to a gentry family he certainly started with other ambitions than becoming the leader of a popular religious sect. The role first offered to him was that of an official and Confucian scholar and he abandoned it only after his failure in the government examinations. He did not forsake, however, his Confucian orientation and ideals. The language and moral standards of Confucianism remained the base of his teaching and throughout his life he maintained good relations with many officials and Confucian literati. His was indeed not the typical career of a sect founder. Yet, as we have seen, his community gradually developed traits of a religious movement, and the role his followers expected of him also changed his self-image. The Three-in-One Teaching moved to the edge of officially supported cultural standards and took a position at the intersection of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. This position was not unlike the one Luo Menghong's movement had in its early phase. Both Lin Zhao'en and Luo Menghong were convinced of teaching a correct understanding of orthodox traditions, Buddhism in the case of Luo, Confucianism and the unity of the Three Teachings in Lin's case. And they both not only gained recognition as teachers from an increasing number of followers but were also respected by members of the more educated classes. But in both cases there was suspicion of heterodoxy.

Lin Zhao'en and his teachings were attacked several times by local officials, and the reasons given show the usual stereotypes of heterodox religious movements. In 1585 Yang Sizhi 楊四知, a regional official, wrote a proclamation accusing Lin Zhao'en of heterodoxy, which was posted for public distribution. He calls Lin a weird man (*yaoren* 妖人), the usual designation for magicians and religious charlatans. His heterodox utterances (*xieshuo* 邪說) deceive the world and mislead the people. Since it does great harm to the luminous teaching (of Confucianism) it should by strictly forbidden by the law. The proclamation goes on to describe Lin Zhao'en as a sect leader who uses his healing skills to lure people into his dependency. If people do not pay homage to him as teacher he does not cure them. Those who accept him have to go through a ritual of initiation with incense burning, writing talismans, chanting spells, and swearing oaths. They also have to worship a pictorial image and to keep a vegetarian diet. The number of his followers has

increased to several thousands and among them are people of the worst reputation. Hence, Lin Zhao'en is depicted as a dangerous charlatan who poses a threat to social order. The proclamation concludes demanding that Lin's books and his Three Teachings Hall should be burned.[282]

The main points of this accusation are similar to those levelled against leaders of popular religious sects. However, there is one striking difference. Yang Sizhi seems to have been particularly upset by Lin Zhao'en's claim to be the true interpreter of the Confucian tradition and to continue the teachings of the sages of antiquity. He therefore gives much room to proving Lin's offences against the Confucian standards of propriety: Lin is accused of presenting his own writings as *jing* (classical scripture) implying that his teaching be everlasting and cannot be changed. But none of the classical writings of the Confucian tradition were called *jing* by their authors. Lin apparently wanted to put himself above the saints of antiquity and to surpass even Zhu Xi who had summarized the great achievements of the Confucian tradition. His teaching is truly what Confucius and Mencius called extremist and heretical and must therefore be thoroughly criticized to avoid it leading people astray.

Yang Sizhi's remarks show that he was aware of the differences between Lin Zhao'en and other more popular religious leaders. Lin's Confucian erudition was obviously sufficient to judge him by the standards of Confucian orthodoxy. He was not simply a common healer who deluded his followers but a scholar well-versed in the classical traditions, who claimed to have reached the true understanding of their fundamental unity. It should be noted that asserting the unity of the Three Teachings was not heterodox in itself, after all it had been proclaimed by none lesser than the first Ming emperor.[283] What made Lin heterodox in Yang Sizhi's view was his rejecting the orthodox interpretation of the Confucian teaching based on Zhu Xi and his state-approved tradition. This may have been heterodox by Yang Sizhi's standards, but it was another type of heterodoxy than the usual popular sects that clearly fell under the law against heterodox religious practices, although Yang certainly attempted to list facts suggesting that this law should be applied.

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[282] *Lin zi benxing shilu*, pp. 83–90. Cf. Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, pp. 98–100.

[283] On Ming Taizu's *Sanjiao lun* 三教論 (On the Three Teachings) see Berling, *The syncretic religion of Lin Chao-en*, pp. 46 f.

That Lin Zhao'en's case was perceived as different can be derived from the reactions of Yang Sizhi's superior who discouraged memorializing to the throne because the outcome of such a measure was uncertain and could fall back to the memorialist. He recommended instead simply to post a proclamation prohibiting Lin's activities. Although on Yang Sizhi's order the printing blocks of Lin's books were burned, the measure did not seriously affect Lin's popularity and the further growth of his movement.[284] This remarkable immunity against official persecution confirms that Lin Zhao'en was not regarded as a common criminal like other sect leaders. He enjoyed a good reputation in the region as a member of the local gentry who had cared for the community in times of crisis. His family was rich and respected and maintained good relations with officials and scholars. Lin Zhao'en himself had many influential admirers and, though he certainly was not regarded as an equal by higher-ranking literati, he belonged to a social milieu that was much nearer to the cultural norms of the elites than any other of the popular religious sects in his time. The social support he received from his extended family and from people of influence made him less vulnerable to the attacks of single officials. He may have been a Confucian heretic, but his social and political visions were still firmly based on Confucian values and morality.[285]

Given the Confucian orientation in his views of social order and individual conduct, it is the more remarkable that his movement developed characteristics of organization not unlike the more popular sects. As the number of his disciples grew he developed rituals of initiation which allowed to clearly distinguish between members and non-members. Members, who were called *daoren* 道人 (men of the Way) were registered and not allowed to expose the secrets revealed to them to outsiders, even not to their own parents. They also had to pay contributions which were inscribed in a record book.[286] While Lin Zhao'en, who was wealthy enough not to seek material profit, does not seem to have used this money for private purposes, it is evident that his movement was under the same pressure as other sects to enlarge its

[284] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, pp. 99 f.

[285] The reasons for Lin's relatively strong position against official attacks have been analysed in detail by Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, pp. 103–113.

[286] *Lin zi benxing shilu*, p. 87. This information is part of Yang Sizhi's accusations. Since Lin Zhao'en's community was well known, we can exclude that he invented facts that could easily have been disproved.

material resources. Constructing temples, printing books, travelling, charity, and missionary work all demanded money which could only be obtained through the donations of members. There were certain internal dynamics of development. A growing community had to secure its material resources and to provide a suitable organizational structure to deal with the increasing complexity of the movement. Lin had proved to be an able organizer when he initiated and led the relieve activities during the pirate raids, and he had also given strict regulations to the disciples of his school and the members of his movement. He had chosen a number of dedicated disciples to assist him in publishing his writings, building temples, propagating the teachings in other regions and keeping contact to the various communities.[287] His movement thus not only secured its material resources but also broadened its organizational and communicative resources. They were sufficient even to withstand the attacks of individual officials who mistrusted the growing influence of this man and his organization.

The Sanyi jiao after Lin Zhao'en's death

Not much is known about the internal organization of the *Sanyi jiao* during Lin Zhao'en's lifetime. There were, however, not too many patterns available after which a mass movement led by a commoner could have been built. A very common structure, which could be found among Buddhist monks and Daoist priests but even among artisans and of course in popular sects, was the relationship between master and disciples. In an extending community, many new members were recruited by people other than the head master himself, and in this way there developed a nested hierarchy of disciples ranked according to their relative closeness to the head of the movement. It is uncertain whether Lin Zhao'en promoted such an organizational structure, but it is clear that soon after his death his community was modelled after that pattern. When the central authority of the founder had disappeared, leadership passed to his main disciples. By that time, the movement was an expanding enterprise comprising more than twenty temples and thousands of followers. Lin Zhao'en does not seem to have designated a successor and it is therefore not surprising that several of his close disciples claimed leadership and the *Sanyi jiao* split into a number

[287] For Lin's major disciples cf. Dean, *Lord of the Three in One,* pp. 114–125.

of branches.[288] The teaching had by that time already spread far beyond the boundaries of Fujian province. Some disciples whom Lin had sent as missionaries continued their work in other provinces and founded new temples and congregations. The *Sanyi jiao* was thus brought to Anhui province and even to Peking.[289] While its further history in these places is obscure, the community in Nanjing developed into a centre of the *Sanyi jiao* that gained some reputation.

The movement had spread to Nanjing even during Lin Zhao'en's lifetime. After his death, his disciple Zhang Hongdu 張洪都 founded a temple there. Zhang Hongdu is the author of Lin's first biography *Lin zi xingshi* 林子行實 (*True Acts of Master Lin*). As he went further to Peking in 1610, the temple built by him soon fell into disrepair, but in 1621 Zhenlai 真賴, a former servant of Lin Zhao'en's who had for some years been an itinerant monk, reconstructed a large temple.[290] This temple became a centre of *Sanyi jiao* activities that made the sect renowned in the region and led to a considerable growth in membership. Most new converts, "eight or nine out of ten," were attracted by the wish to be healed. Zhenlai taught Lin Zhao'en's Confucian Mind Method of cultivation, which was very effective in curing many diseases. Furthermore, this method of healing did not demand the use of medicine and was therefore inexpensive. Zhenlai also organized a relief project for the poor following the example of his master. In the decade after 1622, the Nanjing congregations provided more than thirteen thousand coffins to bury those who had no relatives or for other reasons could not be properly buried. In addition, they bought plots on cemeteries and held funeral services for them. These charitable activities reflect a deep sense of social responsibility based on Lin Zhao'en's teachings. Since during the Tianqi era (1621–1627) the country went into a

[288] *Jinling Zhongyi tang xingshi* 金陵中一堂行實, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 749.

[289] Wang Xing 王興 and Chen Biao 陳標 founded temples in Zhejiang and Anhui, Zhang Hongdu 張洪都 in Nanjing and Peking. They all were Lin's direct disciples. The *Sanyi jiao* communities in Anhui and Peking do not seem to have survived the Ming dynasty (Ma/Han, pp. 749 f). It should be recalled, however, that in 1746 more than hundred *Sanjiao tang* (Three Teachings Halls) were found in the Tongzhou region in the vicinity of Peking. These halls were used by members of various sects, among them the *Hongyang jiao* (see above p. 334). Since *Sanjiao tang* was the name Lin Zhao'en used for his temple this may be a late evidence of his movement's former presence in this region.

[290] The *Jinling Zhongyi tang* 金陵中一堂 (Centre in One Temple of Jinling [i.e. Nanjing]). The history of this branch of the *Sanyi jiao* is recorded in the *Jinlin Zhongyitang xingshi.*

serious economic crisis, this kind of charity met the needs of an increasingly impoverished population. At the same time it helped to make the *Sanyi jiao* a well-known and respected part of the local community.[291]

The Nanjing branch was capable to collect considerable resources, which were necessary for the relief operations and the construction and maintenance of a large temple as a centre of social services. This was only possible with the support of members who were committed enough to contribute part of their own wealth to the activities of the community. A religious community that could mobilize such a high degree of commitment must have offered significant rewards to its members. Though the desire for health may have been the major factor to turn to the movement, it probably was not enough to explain the dynamics of its ongoing activities. Lin Zhao'en's teachings seem to have corresponded to the spiritual and intellectual needs of many people who were dissatisfied with what the more orthodox forms of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism had to offer. It was a syncretic and eclectic teaching that eliminated the institutional restrictions of the established traditions. And it was a teaching open to everyone without the need to pass examinations, to be initiated as a priest or to become a monk. At the same time it included what many considered the most valuable elements of the Three Teachings: Confucian morality, social order and responsibility, Daoist cultivation of inner nature and physical life, and Buddhist ideas of enlightenment and deliverance. Anyone searching for spiritual cultivation and intellectual orientation had acquired a certain familiarity with these elements, which were part of the commonly shared cultural cosmos in Ming China. Thus, Lin Zhao'en's teaching was at the same time new and familiar. It was familiar in the sense that it did not introduce ideas and symbols that were strange and contradicted the common sense. New it was in that it cast prevailing ideas into a unified system that provided an alternative to the rigid and exclusive orthodoxies of the Three Teachings. Moreover, it proved its truth in practice through curing disease and encouraging social responsibility of the believers. Most new converts were certainly attracted by these visible aspects of the *Sanyi jiao*, but for many this was the door to a deeper penetration into Lin Zhao'en's teachings. Reading his scriptures was part of the communal activities. In 1629 members of the Nanjing congregation started editing and printing a new collection

[291] For the history of the Nanjing branch of the *Sanyi jiao* see Ma/Han, pp. 750–755 and Dean, *Lord of the Three in One,* pp. 125–129.

of the master's writings. Work was finished in 1631 and published as *Lin zi quanji* 林子全集 (Collected writings of Master Lin) in forty books of more than three thousand double pages.[292] The Nanjing branch evidently was a most active centre of the *Sanyi jiao* during the last decades of the Ming dynasty. It survived the end of the Ming, but there is no evidence of his further history during the Qing dynasty.

The situation is different with the branches centring in Fujian province, the home area of Lin Zhao'en. There, the movement had taken roots deep enough to survive even the Qing dynasty and to experience an amazing revival since the end of the nineteenth century. Kenneth Dean has done extensive field research on present-day *Sanyi jiao* groups in Fujian and thoroughly analysed their ritual traditions and social role. He has shown that soon after Lin Zhao'en's death the Fujian community was divided into at least two competing branches under the leadership of Lu Wenhui and Lin Zhenming 林貞明 (alias Lin Zhijing 林至敬). Both were direct disciples of Master Lin, who had entrusted Lu Wenhui with editing his writings to publish the *Lin zi sanjiao zhengzong tonglun* 林子三教正宗統論 (*Orthodox Collection of Master Lin's Discussions about the Three in One teaching*). This collection gained canonical status in his branch. Lu Wenhui also wrote a biography of Lin Zhao'en, *Lin zi benxing shilu* 林子本行實錄 (*True Records of the Acts of Master Lin*), which is more a hagiography recounting many miraculous events. This biography repeatedly alludes to the cosmic dimension of Lin's appearance in the world and his identity with Maitreya based on a rather literal understanding of some of Lin's writings.[293] The Master is depicted as a supernatural saviour. Already the extraordinary circumstances of his birth foreshadowed his future position: The year corresponded exactly to an old prophecy about the year of Maitreya's descend, and on the day of his birth heaven was illuminated by auspicious light.[294] Like Maitreya, Lin was a subduer of demons,[295] and as in the

[292] A copy of this edition is stored in the Zhejiang Provincial Library (Ma/Han, p. 753, note 2). There are several other collections using the same title, one of them published already in 1606. Cf. Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, p. 298.

[293] Dean (*Lord of the Three in One*, pp. 149–151) quotes from the *Benti jing* 本體經 (Scripture on Original Substance) and the *Mile jing* 彌勒經 (Maitreya Scripture) in which Lin declares himself to be the Master of the Universe who has taken over Śākyamuni's position to save humankind in the Third Dragon-Flower Assembly and thus identifies himself with Maitreya. However, these formulations are open to interpretation, since they might also be a symbolic description of the experience of unity with the whole cosmos. Cf. above note 272.

[294] *Lin zi benxing shilu*, pp. 11 f.

case of Confucius the appearance of a unicorn at the end of his life marked him as saint destined to rule the world by his teaching.[296] The process which transformed Lin Zhao'en from a human teacher to a divine manifestation began already during his lifetime, and even if the Master may not have encouraged his disciples to worship him as a divine saviour, he does not seem to have opposed this kind of exaltation. In any case, after his death Lin's deification was a matter of fact. His image and from 1613 his statue were worshipped in the *Sanyi jiao* temples whose number expanded to over fifty by the middle of the seventeenth century.

Under the leadership of Lu Wenhui and his successors, the *Sanyi jiao* movement quickly acquired all attributes of a religion. Not only were temples built, they had also a set of canonical writings and an evolving literary tradition explaining and elaborating the teaching. At the same time liturgical texts were composed for use in various rituals. These liturgies were mostly derived from Buddhist and Daoist ritual texts, but also from Confucian liturgies. The *Sanyi jiao* thus "achieved the status of a parallel ritual tradition."[297] Parallel it was not only to the ritual traditions of the three orthodox teachings but also to other popular sects. The lower Yangtze region and Fujian had a long history of popular religious activities. In addition, the Luo tradition had been introduced from the North in the sixteenth century and expanded to the same areas where the *Sanyi jiao* was active. Although we have not much information about other sects during this time, we can conclude from the history of the *Zhaijiao* that the groups led by Yin Ji'nan and later Yao Wenyu were just the tip of an iceberg of various sectarian communities in the southern coastal regions. Exchange of personnel and ideas was common among them. There is no evidence, however, of direct contacts between the *Sanyi jiao* and other popular sects. A possible explanation could be that at least in its early phase the *Sanyi jiao* was rooted in a social milieu that was different from most other popular religious groups. Furthermore, the prevailing symbolism of the *Sanyi jiao* was shaped by the Confucian tradition while in most other sects Buddhist symbols dominated. Hence, the social and cultural

[295] *Lin zi benxing shilu,* p. 73.

[296] *Lin zi benxing shilu,* p. 101. The unicorn was seen in 1588 and again in 1598 shortly after Lin's death.

[297] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One,* p. 155. Dean describes and analyses *Sanyi jiao* liturgies and rituals in detail, pp. 148–162, 187–226.

differences between the *Sanyi jiao* and other sects were bigger than among most popular religious sects. This certainly limited contacts and the exchange of personnel significantly, at least at the top level.

On the other hand, we have seen that even at a very early stage of its development the *Sanyi jiao* was exposed to the influence of ideas and symbols that had their main focus in popular religious sects. The influence of this symbolism centring around the figure of Maitreya and the Third Dragon-Flower Assembly is evident in both Fujian branches of the *Sanyi jiao*.[298] It would certainly be wrong to see in the use of these symbols a latent millenarianism based on the expectation of Maitreya's descent.[299] There is no millenarian context in Lin Zhao'en's teachings. Maitreya and the Dragon-Flower Assembly were, as it were, symbols floating freely in the cultural space of Chinese society. The density of these symbols was higher in certain sectarian milieus where they could combine with other symbols including the three *kalpas* and the final catastrophe to form a millenarian or even apocalyptic compound. However, as can be seen in the case of the *Sanyi jiao*, these symbols were not confined to millenarian contexts but had emanated into the space of commonly available symbols. From there they could be drawn and worked into different contexts where they possibly acquired different meanings. Without a millenarian context, Maitreya could simply signify a saviour who comes into the world to restore the lost knowledge of the original truth shared by the Three Teachings. And the Dragon-Flower Assembly could stand for the congregation of believers who hear and follow the teachings of this saviour.

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[298] Among the liturgical texts composed by Lu Wenhui is the *Longhua sanhui chanwen* 龍華三會懺文 (Litany for the Third Dragon-Flower Assembly), cf. Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, p. 153. The symbol of the Third Dragon-Flower Assembly occurs already in Lin Zhao'en's *Benti jing*. Dean observes that in at least one *Sanyi jiao* scripture the symbol of the Eternal Mother (*Wusheng Laomu*) is mentioned (p. 23, note 25).

[299] Kenneth Dean interprets references to Maitreya and the Third Dragon-Flower Assembly as "postapocalyptic" in that Lin Zhao'en has already manifested the *dao* (*Lord of the Three in One*, p. 23). This concept is an important contribution to the understanding of Maitreya beliefs in popular sects since it helps to do away with the common idea that any reference to Maitreya in sectarian contexts implies apocalyptic or millenarian expectations. However, in the case of Lin Zhao'en even "postapocalyptic" is misleading for there is no apocalypse at all.

Cultural space and sectarian teachings

Thus, the *Sanyi jiao* did not remain unaffected by symbols and role expectations prevailing in more popular religious traditions. This is noteworthy since the cultural and educational background of Lin Zhao'en was saturated with Confucian symbols and attitudes and his synthesis of the Three Teachings was based mainly on the literary traditions of the elite culture. One could be attempted to conclude that the reference to Maitreya was due to the impact popular sects of the Maitreyist type had on local culture. Their presence on the local level may have been stronger than the sources allow to discover. I doubt, however, that such a conclusion is necessary. To be sure, in some locations certain sects were very strong and could even dominate the religious life of whole villages; however, their direct influence in most cases remained confined to rather limited social milieus. In these milieus the density of symbols and concepts which crystallized in popular sects was certainly higher than in the circles of scholars and officials, but the various cultural milieus formed by no means tightly sealed symbol spaces. There were many forms of interaction and exchange allowing the diffusion of symbols within the broader culture. Just as the core symbols of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism were condensed to complex compounds in their specific cultural milieus but at the same time penetrated in diluted form the whole cultural space, symbols of the popular religious traditions diffused beyond the milieus where they were most concentrated. One did not need to belong to a philosophical circle of literati to have heard of *wuji* (limitless) or *taiji* (supreme ultimate), nor was is necessary to be a sect member to have some idea of Maitreya and the Dragon-Flower Assembly. The use of these symbols by Lin Zhao'en and Lu Wenhui does not mean, therefore, that they adopted all connotations they had in other contexts. It does show, however, that sectarian teachings were not isolated from the rest of Chinese culture but were part of it. They not only drew from the common stock of symbols and ideas but over many centuries also contributed to it.

Considering the spectrum of popular religious sects in Ming and Qing China, the *Sanyi jiao* holds a marginal position in several respects. Its location within the symbol space of Ming culture was closer to the Confucian centre of gravitation than most other sects. It was also rather close to the Daoist centre, but this it shared with many other

sects. The distance to the centre of Buddhist symbols seems to have been somewhat greater than in the majority of popular sects, although there were certain shifts as the elaboration of rituals modelled after Buddhist paradigms went on. Most significant is, however, that apparently there was only a narrow interface with those popular traditions where the symbol complex of *Wusheng Laomu* and Maitreya appeared in its most condensed form. Thus, exchange of symbols with these traditions, though not completely lacking, remained limited. There was certain distance to the main stream of popular sectarian teachings that made itself felt also in the movement's social composition. Lin Zhao'en was a respected member of the local community and his network of social relations extended deep into the milieu of gentry, scholars, and officials. We know from modern sociological studies that personal networks are the most important single factor for the recruitment of new members to a religious movement.[300] Though there is no information about the personal background of most members of the *Sanyi jiao*, at least in its early phase the number of office holders and educated people was considerably higher than in other popular sects.[301] The construction of more than fifty temples until the end of the Ming, the printing of books and the charitable activities show that the movement continued to be supported by members of the higher classes.[302] This was a social milieu different from most other sects, which may explain that the *Sanyi jiao* remained at the margins of the sectarian spectrum.

The differences between the *Sanyi jiao* and other popular sects seem to suggest that the former was closer to the elite culture. While this cannot be completely denied for Lin Zhao'en himself, the further development of his movement clearly shows it as being part of the popular culture in Putian and the neighbouring areas. This has been analysed in detail by Kenneth Dean. Dean has observed that particularly the second branch of the *Sanyi jiao* in Putian, which goes back to Lin Zhenming, was strongly influenced by the cults of local deities, many of which were included in *Sanyi jiao* temples. In this branch, which

[300] Cf. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The future of religion*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, ch. 14 ("Networks of faith: Interpersonal bonds and recruitment").

[301] Cf. Dean, *Lord of the Three in One,* pp. 123 f.

[302] The community in Nanjing included scholars, officials of various ranks and also eunuchs serving in the offices of the southern capital (cf. Ma/Han, pp. 753 f).

today is known as *Mingxia pai* 明夏派 (Branch of the Enlightened Xia), liturgies were written addressing local and other popular gods that show clear marks of Daoist origins or even the orally transmitted rites of the shamanistic tradition.[303] Although popular deities were also worshipped in Lu Wenhui's branch,[304] the *Mingxia pai* of Lin Zhenming was exposed much more to the influence of local religious traditions.

There was some rivalry between the two branches and Lin Zhenming's tradition was blamed as heterodox in writings of the other side because it had adopted many popular religious practices.[305] The differences certainly increased in the course of time; it should be noted, however, that the rivalry between Lu Wenhui and Lin Zhenming dates back to the time immediately after Lin Zhao'en's death and probably even further. Both were direct disciples of the Master and both claimed leadership after his death. Without doubt this rivalry was mainly due to their personal ambitions to gain control over a dynamic religious movement and its resources, but it is remarkable that there also seem to have been differences in their interpretation of the teaching. Lin Zhenming, who claimed to be the only one who had received the correct transmission, accused Lu Wenhui of withholding some of the Master's scriptures from publication. One text, the *Huiyu* 會語 (*Discussions of the Assembly*), which was later published by Lin Zhenming, is concerned mainly with stressing Lin Zhao'en's identity with Maitreya.[306] This could imply that Lin Zhao'en in its last years emphasized his own role as divine saviour. Be that as it may, it is evident that among his main disciples there were differences in understanding the Master's teachings. Although Lu Wenhui in his *True Records of the Acts of Master Lin* leaves no doubts about Lin Zhao'en's identity with Maitreya, for some reasons he did not include scriptures that clearly confirm this identity in his collection of the Master's writings.[307]

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[303] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, pp. 155–157.

[304] The branch tracing its line of transmission back to Lu Wenhui and his two successors later divided further. See Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, p. 327.

[305] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, p. 122.

[306] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, pp. 120 f. Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain a copy of this scripture.

[307] Neither the *Mile jing* nor the *Benti jing* are included in the *Lin zi sanjiao zhengzong tonglun*. A possible explanation for this omission is that this collection was composed for inclusion into the imperial collection of books (*Lin zi benxing shilu*, p. 147) and any reference to teachings suspected of heterodoxy was therefore avoided.

There is no explicit information explaining why Lin Zhenming wanted to stress this aspect of Lin Zhao'en's teaching more than Lu Wenhui seems to have been willing to do. Both were certainly aware that emphasizing references to Maitreya brought Lin Zhao'en's teaching closer to popular sects and exposed it to the suspicion of heterodoxy. This would have estranged that part of its supporters that belonged to the rather orthodox milieus of scholars and officials. On the other hand, it would have made the teaching fitting more to the expectations and frames of reference of popular religious milieus. It might well be that Lin Zhenming, who as a religious leader had his stronghold in his home village of Yuexiu 岳秀,[308] relied on another type of clientele than Lu Wenhui. As the further development of Lin Zhenming's *Mingxia* branch shows, it was very close to the local religious traditions, while Lu Wenhui's branch was mainly influenced by the more orthodox literate traditions. Of course, lack of detailed information does not permit to substantiate this interpretation beyond any doubt. Evidence suggests, however, that the division of the *Sanyi jiao* after Lin Zhao'en's death into various branches reflected to some degree already existing networks built by his disciples.[309] These networks, though partially overlapping on the top levels, extended to different social and cultural milieus—to the middle class of literati and officials on the one hand, and to the lower class of peasants and village dwellers on the other. The influence of and response to divergent cultural milieus may help to explain why the two leaders emphasized different aspects of the *Sanyi* teaching.

Even if Lin Zhao'en's *Sanyi jiao* did not represent the dominant type of popular religious sect, it allows to gain some insight into the interconnection of different cultural and social milieus. Starting from an orthodox Confucian basis, Lin Zhao'en gradually moved to the edges of orthodoxy and on this way extended the scope of his understanding by incorporating Daoist, Buddhist, and finally popular religious symbols. As an individual he kept his roots in the milieu of gentry and local dignitaries, but at the same time accepted the role of a religious charismatic who practised healing and did not oppose being worshipped

[308] Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, p. 119.

[309] Lin Zhenming apparently used is role as propagator of the *Sanyi jiao* to build his own network of disciples. His alleged wealth (cf. Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, p. 122) may have been a result of his role as religious leader, although no information is available about his family background.

as a supernatural saviour and manifestation of Maitreya. Thus, in his person different cultural milieus converged. This is even more true for the movement founded by him. The networks of his disciples included scholars and officials but also peasants and illiterates. Different cultural milieus may have preferred different aspects, but they still shared the common base of teachings and practices propagated by Lin Zhao'en. This certainly proves the great appeal and ingenuity of his teaching, which succeeded in mediating between various milieus. But it shows at the same time that the boundaries between these milieus were permeable. They were permeable socially because networks extending to different directions intersected at some points, and they were permeable culturally because different milieus participated in the same cultural space where symbols drifted between various centres of gravitation. The *Sanyi jiao* is particularly instructive in this regard, since Lin Zhao'en consciously combined symbols of various traditions to a new synthesis. It was a synthesis that drew its elements not only from the three great traditions but also from the popular reservoir of symbols. The *Sanyi jiao* formed, as it were, a new nucleus of gravitation in which symbols floating within the cultural space condensed and coalesced. Continuing the spatial metaphor, we could say that this nucleus of gravitation had its position somewhere in between the main poles of the cultural space, the condensed compounds of symbols represented by the Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist literary traditions, but also by the somewhat less condensed popular religious culture. Depending on the relative distance to the main centres of gravitation, the concentration of specific symbols varied. Applying this metaphorical terminology, we can say that Lin Zhao'en's position within the cultural space shifted. Whereas the distance to the Confucian pole slightly increased, it approached the fields of gravitation of the other poles, including the field of popular religious symbols.

It is probable that this gradual shift within the cultural space corresponded to changes in the social composition of Lin Zhao'en's following. As the *Sanyi jiao* grew to a mass movement, the number of members who were closer to popular than to official traditions naturally increased. Social interaction facilitated the exchange of symbols, and Lin Zhao'en's adoption of such symbols as Maitreya and the Dragon-Flower Assembly can be understood against this background. In the course of its further development the *Sanyi jiao,* or rather its various branches, did not keep a fixed position within the cultural space but

moved within a certain sphere of it. The *Mingxia* branch came nearer to the pole of popular traditions, while Lu Wenhui's branch seems to have shifted to the Buddhist pole. Of course, this is still a simplification which ignores internal differentiation and continuing changes. However, this metaphorical model may help to understand better that popular religious movements had no unchanging identity but permanently redefined their position within the cultural space.

This does of course not only apply to popular religious movements but to all religious traditions. Even the great traditions, which marked the main poles of the cultural space, had no fixed position but were under the influence of the other centres of gravitation. Here it is not necessary to further elaborate this aspect, which is sufficiently evident in the long history of the mutual interaction of the Three Teachings. More important in the present context is the observation that popular sects were not isolated enclaves, but nuclei in which influences of the surrounding cultural space converged. The symbol compounds formed in these nuclei brought about new syntheses condensing in sectarian teachings and crystallizing in their scriptures. While the position of these nuclei in the cultural space could vary considerably between individual sects but also in the course of their development, it usually was within the gravitational field of popular traditions. In fact, taken as a whole, the sectarian nuclei formed a centre of gravitation of its own right. Though weaker than the official traditions and the non-sectarian popular tradition, this centre had some attraction, as can be seen from the spread of popular sects in late Ming. And the symbol compounds that were condensed in the sectarian traditions radiated into the cultural space. Thus, sectarian teachings contributed to the symbolic repertoire of Chinese culture as their symbols and ideas diffused into the larger society. The transformation of Lin Zhao'en's movement from a school of Confucian learning to a popular religious movement can be taken as an illustration of this mechanism.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOMOGENIZATION AND DIVERSIFICATION OF SECTARIAN TRADITIONS

Taking up the metaphor of *symbol space* we can describe Chinese religious culture in terms of homogeneity as well as heterogeneity. It was *homogeneous* in the sense that most religious symbols and practices were part of this culture and potentially available to all who acted within in. It was *heterogeneous* to the degree that the density of particular symbols and practices was unequally distributed in various cultural and religious milieus. Thus, the probability to meet the symbols of Maitreya or the three cosmic periods was much lower in a milieu of Confucian literati than in popular religious milieus. However, as we have seen in the case of Lin Zhao'en, the boundaries between various milieus were permeable, which allowed the diffusion of symbols within the cultural space. On the other hand, there were certain centres of gravitation where particular clusters of symbols appeared in condensed form and which, therefore, can appropriately be described as specific religious milieus. It is in this sense that we can distinguish the sectarian milieu from other traditions of the religious culture.

However, to talk of a *sectarian milieu* implies more than the condensation of certain symbols. The religious culture was not just differentiated by the unequal distribution of symbols. To the condensation of symbols corresponded the formation of more or less closed networks of social relationships. Of course, these networks were rarely completely closed, as sect members continued to interact to some degree with nonmembers. Otherwise, proselytizing would have been impossible. And there was significant social exchange between different sectarian groups. The boundaries of the sectarian milieu were not the same as the boundaries of individual sects. The sectarian milieu is defined socially by the networks of social relationship in which sect members acted. These networks were closed to the extent that a high proportion of members' social relationships were with other members.[1] They were open to the extent

[1] Cf. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A theory of religion*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996, p. 61.

that they included social relationships with nonmembers who shared a similar social or intellectual background.

Social interaction and communication imply exchange: exchange of material goods, such as money, and exchange of ideas, moods, and expectations. Hence, the networks that connected sect members and, as it were, potential sect members tended to have a certain degree of cultural homogeneity. To resume the previous terminology: The density of particular symbols was higher within the social networks of sect members than in the surrounding society. We may thus characterize a sectarian milieu by the two aspects of condensation of particular symbols and the formation of specific structures of social interaction. Both aspects conditioned and reinforced each other. The concept of *sectarian milieu* allows to overcome the idea of tightly closed sect boundaries. Sectarian milieus were closed in the same way as were the milieus of literati or for that matter Buddhist monks. There was interaction and exchange with non-sectarians, but interaction and exchange were more intense within the sectarian milieus. And a sectarian milieu was not confined to the members of an individual sect but encompassed religious groups and individuals who shared a high proportion of religious symbols and participated in common social networks. The networks established by individual sects can be seen as subsystems nested within the more extended networks of the sectarian milieu in which they operated. Thus, interaction between various sects of the same milieu was much more intense that interaction with other milieus, which accounted for an increasing homogenization of such sects. The present chapter will illustrate this interaction of various sects within a sectarian milieu in north China.

1. The Longhua Jing (Dragon-Flower Scripture) as Synthesis of Sectarian Traditions in North China

Huang Yupian 黃育楩, a county magistrate in Zhili who in the nineteenth century published a critical discussion of heterodox teachings, starts the first chapter of his first book with extensive quotations from the *Longhua jing* (Dragon-Flower Scripture).[2] For him, who had collected

[2] *Poxie xiangbian* 破邪詳辯. by Huang Yupian 黃育楩, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982. For a critical edition see Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穗, ed., *Kōchū Haja shōben* 校注破邪詳辯. Tokyo: Dōkyō kankōkai, 1972.

and read a great number of *baojuan*, this scripture was the most representative of sectarian writings, a judgement that has been echoed by many modern scholars.[3] The *Longhua jing* is in some way a summary of the main themes found in sectarian writings of the late Ming dynasty. Its full title is *Gufo Tianzhen kaozheng Longhua baojing* 古佛天真考證龍華寶經 (*Precious Scripture on the Dragon-Flower Verified by the Ancient Buddha Heavenly Truth*).[4]

To see in the *Longhua jing* a synthesis of all previous sectarian teachings corresponds to the self-understanding of the scripture. In the introductory part it is declared that "this scripture is the *dharma*-master of all scriptures, the true principle of ten-thousand volumes. It embraces heaven and earth and provides complete understanding of the ten-thousand teachings."[5] From the time when the primordial chaos divided, it always existed. To reveal it to humanity "the *Tianzhen Gufo* 天真古佛 (Ancient Buddha of Heavenly Truth)[6] opened the treasury in the heavenly Native Place and took out the *Longhua jing*."[7] Here, *Tianzhen Gufo* is introduced as the divine intermediator who confers the redemptive message of this book to overcome the multiplicity of the countless teachings and bring them back to their root, which is one single vehicle. Thus, the *Longhua jing* depicts itself as including and transcending all previous teachings that all have their origin in the unchanging truth preserved in the heavenly treasure house.

Two hundred years earlier, the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* had maintained the same claim to "embrace all *baojuan* of the world,"[8] which shows

[3] Studies on the *Longhua jing* include Sawada Mizuho, *Kōchū Haja shōben*, pp. 164–218; Richard Shek, *Religion and society in late Ming*, pp. 287–301; Ma/Han, pp. 859–883; Kerr, *Precious Scrolls in Chinese popular religious culture*, vol. 1, pp. 23–96; Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, pp. 248–271. Kerr gives an English summary of the twenty-four chapters of the *Longhua jing* on pp. 247–292.

[4] I have used a photocopy of a 1929 Peking reprint, which was kindly provided by Ma Xisha, and the reprint of an undated edition in *MJZJ*, vol. 5. References are to the edition in *MJZJ*, which is easier available to most readers. Che Xilun (*Zhongguo baojuan zonglu*, No. 533) lists seven editions, most of them from the Republican era.

[5] *Longhua jing*, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 644a. For a full translation of this passage cf. Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, pp. 254 f.

[6] The translation of *tianzhen* is difficult. Kerr (*Precious scrolls in Chinese popular religious culture*, 23) renders it as "heavenly purity", which hardly meets the semantic content of the symbol. Overmyer, who usually translates the names of deities, leaves it untranslated. I use "heavenly truth" as a conventional translation. A better but unhandy translation for *zhen* would be "true reality."

[7] *Longhua jing*, introduction, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 644a.

[8] *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, introduction, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 227.

that the unity of sectarian teachings was not a new theme. While we do not know any of the *baojuan* that the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* may have had in mind, in the case of the *Longhua jing* we know some of the earlier scriptures on which it obviously depended. We are, therefore, in a position to reconstruct some of the connections within the sectarian milieu. Already the picture of *Tianzhen Gufo* opening the treasure house to take out the scripture is an only slightly altered quotation from the *Pujing rulai yaoshi baojuan.* There we find the same picture with the *Yaoshi Fo* (Key Buddha) instead of *Tianzhen Gufo* who takes out a *Precious Scroll of Wonderful Meaning that Comes from the West* (*Xilai miaoyi baojuan* 西來妙意寶卷) instead of the *Longhua jing*.[9] And it is the Buddha who reveals this story, while in the *Longhua jing* it is *Wusheng* (*Laomu*), the Eternal Mother. In the nutshell of a single sentence we find here a principle that applies to the messages of many early *baojuan*: The structure is the same while individual symbols are interchangeable. Sectarian *baojuan* were part of a religious milieu that by the early seventeenth century had developed its own scriptural tradition. The *Longhua jing* was an outgrowth of this literary tradition and brought together symbols and beliefs prevailing in the sectarian milieu of northern China. Before analysing the mutual literary and personal relations within this milieu, I shall summarize the main themes of this scripture.

Teachings of the Longhua jing

The *Longhua jing* is full of names that seem to refer to deities. It is, however, not always completely clear how these symbols are related to each other. The central deity, which appears in the title of the scripture, is *Gufo*, the Ancient Buddha. The second chapter describes the Ancient Buddha as the creator who has established heaven and earth and divided the primordial chaos. At the same time *Wusheng Laomu*, the Unborn Venerable Mother, is introduced, who is likewise depicted as a creative deity. She brought forth the cosmic principles of *yin* and *yang* and the first couple of Fuxi and Nüwa who became the ancestors of humankind. The exact relationship of *Gufo* and *Wusheng Laomu* is open to interpretation. As partner of *Wusheng Laomu*, the Ancient Buddha is called more specifically *Wuji Gufo* 無極古佛 (Ancient Buddha Limit-

[9] *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 15, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 96. Actually, each chapter of this scripture opens with this sentence altering only the name of the *baojuan* and the name of the treasury.

less).[10] On the level of mythological images they are clearly two different deities, a divine couple,[11] while the internal logic of the cosmogonical account demands the unity of the creative principle. A solution of this seeming contradiction is implied in the concept of *Wusheng Fumu* 無生父母 (Unborn Parents, lit. "Unborn Father and Mother"),[12] which suggests one single creative force personalized in two aspects. There is even a third symbol used to denote the divine principle: *Gufo* is also equated with *Tianzhen Gufo* (Ancient Buddha Heavenly Truth),[13] whose main role is to reveal the saving teaching to humanity. Thus, we find three personalized symbols that refer to one single principle. As the text goes on, the different aspects of the Absolute become more apparent.

Having explained the creation of the whole cosmos and the origin of humankind as the work of a transcendent creator acting as *Gufo* and *Wusheng Laomu*, the a message of salvation turns to the present state of humanity. Men are children of divine origin, but they have forgotten it and lost contact to their native place. The native place stands for being close to the divine creator, and returning to the native place is the usual metaphor for salvation. Salvation then implies overcoming the present condition, which is characterized as being sunk into the sea of suffering. The scripture describes in mythological images the reason for this state of misery and sin. After creation, the cosmos was cold and static and the world was empty without any men living on it. The divine parents therefore sent the children to the Eastern Land to live in the mundane world. They obeyed, but did not want to stay in the Eastern Land. They still kept contact with their progenitor and moved freely between the Eastern Land and the West, their native place, as the Mother had admonished them. This uncorrupted state, however, did not last since in the Eastern Land the children united in marriages. Wine, sensual pleasure, wealth, and wrath obstructed their true mind and they indulged in the debauched pleasures of the mundane world. Thus they forgot their eternal creator and were endlessly reborn in the sea of suffering.[14]

[10] See e.g. *Longhua jing*, ch. 3, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 653b.

[11] Cf. *Longhua jing*, ch. 2 (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 651b): "Venerable *Yin* and Venerable *Yang* gave birth to numerous children, Little *Yin* and Little *Yang* produced humankind." Here "Venerable *Yin*" and "Venerable *Yang*" clearly refer to *Wusheng Laomu* and *Gufo*.

[12] *Longhua jing*, ch. 2, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 651a.

[13] Cf. *Longhua jing*, ch. 1 (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 649a), where we read: "*Tianzhen Gufo* divided the chaos origin", which implies that he is the same as *Gufo*.

[14] *Longhua jing*, ch. 2 (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 651a/b), compare also ch. 4 (p. 657a) for a

This mythological narrative provides the basic structure for the religious interpretation of human existence. Men are originally perfect creatures of their divine creator. The native place symbolizes this uncorrupted state of men's original nature where they are united with their divine parents. This original nature became obscured when they separated from their native place because they were caught by the desire for the pleasures of the mundane world. These pleasures made them forget their native place and led them to sink ever deeper into the realm of sin. They became greedy for luxury and sexual pleasure, strive for fame and profit, and are jealous and adulterous. But since they are unenlightened they do not know their true nature and are unaware of being kept in a sea of suffering. Thus, the account establishes a fundamental dichotomy between the true nature and the native place on the one hand and the corrupted state of existence in the present world on the other. It is only against the background of this dichotomy that the message of salvation gains its meaning.

Since the children, who are led astray in the world of mundane desires, are unaware of their situation, salvation is only possible through divine intervention. The creator wants men to remember their native place and return to it. An enlightened teacher has to make them aware of the endless cycle of birth and death.[15] The sending of the saviour is again elaborated in mythological images: *Gufo* and *Wusheng Laomu* hold a first Dragon-Flower Assembly (*Longhua hui*) in the celestial palace which is attended by ninety-six hundred million (*yi* 億) children of the "august womb." These divine children are all buddhas, patriarchs, great bodhisattvas, arhats, holy monks, gods, and spirits. During this assembly the miraculous omen of a green lotus flower blooming on an iron tree indicates the beginning of a new aeon when a buddha is about to appear in the world. The Unborn Mother accordingly selects *Tianzhen Gufo* as the one who has to descend to the world to appear in human form as the Venerable Patriarch Gongchang 弓長.[16] Gongchang's role is to rescue humankind from its entanglement in the world of mundane desires and to open the way for returning to the

similar account. Ch. 17 again takes up the same motive explaining that the divine children, who all received a jewel from *Gufo*, have abandoned their jewels and thus became immersed into the sea of suffering (pp. 707a-708a).

[15] *Longhua jing*, ch. 4, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 657a.

[16] *Longhua jing*, ch. 3, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 653b-655a.

native place. Thus, he is a saviour who occupies a central role in the theatre of salvation.

The *Longhua jing* describes at length the activities of Gongchang whose body *Tianzhen Gufo* uses to fulfil his cosmic task. He is chosen because of his merits and virtues. The Ancient Buddha (*Gufo*) and the Ancient Mother (*Gumu* 古母) see with their eye of wisdom that he is practising meditation and cultivating his mind day and night. Thus he is summoned to the celestial palace to be instructed by them in the teaching of salvation. The Mother teaches him a cultivation method in ten steps to save all living beings (*shijian xiuxing jiudu zhongsheng* 十件修行救度眾生).[17] The ten steps are not explained in detail, only their names are given, but it is evident that they consist of various forms of *neidan* practices.[18] Hence, the practice of inner alchemy stands in the centre of the way to salvation. The Mother also reveals a secret mantra that has to be recited in the mind.[19]

We see here that the teaching of the sect that regarded Gongchang as saviour contained an exoteric and an esoteric aspect. The exoteric aspect of Gongchang's teaching was the *Longhua jing* itself, which was printed and circulated. Its esoteric aspect were certain practices of inner alchemy and secret mantras, which were transmitted only orally. Just as *Tianzhen Gufo* was said to have opened the treasury of the native place to take out the *Longhua jing,* Gongchang as his human appearance was ordered by the Mother to open the celestial treasury to take out jewels that in this case refer to the practices of cultivation revealed by the Mother.[20]

The cosmic dimensions of Gongchang's role as saviour is elaborated in chapter 13 where he is put on equal rank with the Buddhas Dīpaṃkara, Śākyamuni and Maitreya. Dīpaṃkara, the Ancient Lamplighter Buddha (*Gu Randeng Fo*), is here described as the one who has divided the chaos and established the world.[21] He held a Dragon-Flower Assembly and ruled the world for nine *kalpas* after which he was looking for someone

[17] *Longhua jing,* ch. 5, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 661a.

[18] For a detailed analysis of the ten steps and their equivalents in Daoist *neidan* practices see Ma/Han, pp. 876–881.

[19] *Longhua jing,* ch. 5, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 661a.

[20] *Longhua jing,* ch. 5, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 660b.

[21] Note that Dīpaṃkara is here presented in the same role as *Gufo,* who has established the world, and that *Tianzhen Gufo* had earlier also been described as the creator deity. They all seem just to be different forms and designations of the Absolute that manifests itself in the world.

to continue the transmission of the lamp. This task was taken over by Śākyamuni who ruled for eighteen *kalpas* and in turn transmitted the lamp to Maitreya ruling for eighty-one *kalpas*. One would expect that Maitreya, who is usually regarded as the buddha of the future, closes this line of succession. However, in this case Maitreya's rule clearly belongs to the past since the account continues with Maitreya looking for a successor. He is followed by the Venerable Patriarch Heavenly Truth (*Tianzhen Laozu* 天真老祖).[22] Although the name Gongchang is not mentioned explicitly, it is evident that it is he who continues the work of the three buddhas and thus is placed on an equal footing with them.

It is Gongchang's task to reveal the way to salvation in the present time, which is marked as the turning point at the end of a *kalpa* and the beginning of a new aeon. This makes salvation particularly urgent. As the final *kalpa* is near, the Mother is scared because the divine children are immersed in the sea of suffering and cannot return to the native place. In this time, the three disasters are ahead and the eight difficulties approach.[23] To warn men of the impending catastrophe, she summons Gongchang to the celestial palace and informs him about the coming misery: From the next *jiazi* 甲子 year to the *xinsi* 辛巳 year there will be natural disasters destroying the harvests and causing severe famines. People in Shandong will eat the flesh of men and in Zhili people will die of starvation. Then, after a short period of betterment, there will be earthquakes, floods, and plagues and people will die again. These catastrophic years of the final *kalpa* will be a trial of men's mind. The good people will not suffer from the catastrophic events and survive the difficulties without harm. In this way men with a pure mind will be sorted out.[24] Calamities are ahead and they are caused by the moral decline of mankind. Men of the present age do not respect the beneficence of the divine rulers, they do all kinds of bad deeds, such as destroying food, blaspheming the deities, and suppressing the virtuous. They show no piety towards their parents and like wild beasts harm other people. This accumulation of evil deeds causes the wrath of the gods in heaven who send down the catastrophes of the three disasters and eight difficulties. Therefore, plagues spread everywhere

[22] *Longhua jing*, ch. 13, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 693a-694a.
[23] *Longhua jing*, ch. 17, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 707b/708a.
[24] *Longhua jing*, ch. 18, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 713a/b.

as the final *kalpa* approaches. All the evil that has been accumulated during the former *kalpas* results in these catastrophes of the end period.[25]

The *Longhua jing* offers a very clear teaching that includes cosmology, theology, anthropology, and soteriology. Of course, this teaching is not elaborated and presented systematically as a theological treatise, but contained in an intricate mythological narrative with many redundancies and apparent contradictions. The inconsistencies result mainly from an abundance of names that stand for the same function. Thus, the world is said to have been established by *Wuji Gufo* in one place, by *Tianzhen Gufo* in another and by *Randeng Gufo* (Dīpaṃkara) in a third. Or, to give another example, Gongchang is presented as the successor of Dīpaṃkara, Śākyamuni and Maitreya in chapter 12, while in chapter 16 he is the sixth in a line of succession beginning with *Wuji Shengzu* 無極聖祖 (Holy Patriarch Limitless), *Taiji Shengzu* 太極聖祖 (Holy Patriarch Supreme Ultimate) and *Huangji Shengzu* 皇極聖祖 (Holy Patriarch August Ultimate). These different names probably played a role in ritual when hosts of buddhas and patriarchs were invoked by name to descend to the ritual place; they do not conceal, however, the underlying structure of the religious message. There is one single divine reality that is the source of all being. It is the Absolute that existed before the primordial chaos was divided. However, unlike the *dao* in early Daoism, it works as a divine person. As a person it may act as Ancient Buddha (*Gufo*) or as Unborn Mother (*Wusheng Laomu*) or as whatever else it appears in the mythological narratives. In ritual worship these divine persons could be regarded as distinct, but the structure of the teaching leaves no doubts that there is only one divine reality and no duality.

Also anthropology is clearly structured. Humans are the children of the divine creator. Their original nature is perfect and belongs to the divine realm, which is their native place; but they have lost their original state of purity by being entangled in the futile pleasures of the mundane world. It should be observed that marriage, that is, sexual activity and familial bonds, stands at the beginning of this entanglement. Men do not remember any more their divine parents and therefore do not want to return to them. Thus they became involved ever more in the material world and committed all kinds of sin. Karmic retribution ties them to endless cycles of transmigration in the world of suffering. They cannot free themselves from this state of misery because they are ignorant of it. Their pure mind being obscured, it is only through an

[25] *Longhua jing,* ch. 22, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 730b-731b.

enlightened teacher that they can attain the knowledge necessary for realizing their true nature and overcoming the bondage of the material world. Only then will they be able to comprehend that they are children of the divine father and mother who want them to return to the bliss of the paradise at the native place. To put it shortly, men have fallen from the state of perfection to the state of sin and suffering and are, therefore, in need of salvation.

Soteriology is more complex with the double aspect of divine interference and human endeavour. Since the causes of men's baleful condition are ignorance and separation from the divine origin, it can only be remedied through divine activity. It is the Unborn Father and Mother who want their children to return to the native place and who take the initiative to offer a path to salvation. This is done through revelation to enlighten men on their true nature and to instruct them on how to overcome the suffering of mundane existence. Revelation is enacted repeatedly in history. Divine manifestations and emissaries such as Dīpaṃkara, Śākyamuni and Maitreya, but also Laozi and Confucius have revealed the true teaching to humanity. The last of these revelations is dispensed by Gongchang in whose body the Heavenly Truth (*Tianzhen*) took human form. Though salvation is initiated by divine action, however, it is not achieved through grace and mercy but through human endeavour. Men have to accept the teaching and to follow it. This implies a change of life, to turn away from evil and to do good. Morality is thus an essential element of the teaching, even if the *Longhua jing* is less explicit in this point than other *baojuan*. Its focus is more on the esoteric aspects of the path to salvation, which is a certain practice of inner alchemy. This practice would enable men to realize their true nature and to pave the way for the union with the divine. Salvation means to abandon separating from the divine origin and to return to the Native Place to unite with the divine parents.[26] In mythological language it is described as joining the Dragon-Flower Assembly (*Longhua hui*).

The Dragon-Flower Assembly is a central symbol of the scripture that appears already in its title. However, the meaning of this symbol is ambiguous, for the *Longhua jing* applies it to various contexts. It generally refers to a state of completeness and harmony. The introduc-

[26] The tenth and last step of this cultivation practice is called "To give up going away and to realize coming, and to personally arrive in the Native Place" (*fang qu shou lai qing dao jia zhong* 放去收來親到家中) (ch. 5, p. 661a).

tory section explains five forms of *Longhua hui* beginning with the mythological image of a Dragon-Flower Assembly taking place at the Native Place in the celestial abode. There, all buddhas and bodhisattvas are united in the presence of *Wuji Gufo* and *Wusheng Laomu*. The next form of *Longhua hui* refers to the three Dragon-Flower Assemblies held by the buddhas of the three cosmic periods Dīpaṃkara, Śākyamuni and Maitreya. There the buddhas, patriarchs, and all saints come together to listen to the explanation of the *Longhua jing*. While these two forms of *Longhua hui* are rather literal and conventional interpretations of the symbol *Dragon-Flower Assembly*, the next three give the symbol a broader and more abstract meaning. The *Longhua hui* in the sky refers to the harmonious working of the celestial bodies sun, moon, and stars, while the *Longhua hui* on earth means the functioning of the elements water, fire, and wind in the natural forces. Most remarkable is the fifth form of *Longhua hui*, which takes place within the human body through the cultivation of *jing* (essence), *qi* (pneuma) and *shen* (spirit). Meditative practices of inner alchemy are thus the means to attain the Dragon-Flower Assembly within oneself.[27] Thus, different levels of meaning of the symbol *Dragon-Flower Assembly* appear. Their common reference is harmonic unity and functioning, that is, the harmony of the Absolute with its creation, of men and the divine teaching, of the macro- and microcosms, and of one's own human nature. And it is evident that the Dragon-Flower Assembly that men can actively attain is the one that has to be completed within oneself through the practice of *neidan* meditation. The opening *gāthā* of the *Longhua jing* closes with the lines:

> There is the Dragon-Flower Assembly within one's body, when *xing* and *ming* (inner nature and life) will unite in the Palace and leave the *kunlun*.[28]
>
> And after the end there will be a Dragon-Flower Assembly, when all buddhas and patriarchs together return to the root.[29]

The *Longhua jing* offers a teaching of universal salvation in that it addresses all humans to become aware of their divine origin and return to the Native Place. All men and women are children of the divine father and mother. However, since salvation is not reached through divine

[27] *Longhua jing*, introductory section, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 645a-647b.

[28] "Palace" (*gong*) refers to the *Niwan gong* at the top of the head. *Kunlun* is another expression for the same point (Cf. Hu Fuchen, ed., *Zhonghua Daojiao da cidian*, p. 1164).

[29] *Longhua jing*, introductory section, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 647b. "All buddhas and patriarchs" here means all men who have realized their true nature.

grace alone but depends on men following the offered way to deliverance, it is universal only in principle not in practice. Those who have merits will be admitted to the Dragon-Flower Assembly while the others will be expelled.[30] And during the three disasters and eight difficulties of the final *kalpa* only the virtuous will be saved, but the evildoers will hardly escape. It depends on one's own merit whether one belongs to the unhappy or the good.[31] Hence, only those who hear and follow the teaching revealed in the *Longhua jing* will be saved from the cycle of life and death.

The sectarian background of the Longhua jing: Yuandun jiao

The *Longhua jing* presents itself as the culmination of all previous teachings, which reveals the heavenly truth stored since eternity in the celestial treasure-house. Though claiming singularity, it does not conceal that it was part of an existing tradition of sectarian teachings and scriptures. Gongchang, who is the central figure as revealer of this teaching, is described as a human being who like many other religious teachers was earnestly striving to reach salvation. Before the Eternal Mother chose him to become a human manifestation of the Ancient Buddha of Heavenly Truth (*Tianzhen Gufo*) he had sought instruction from a teacher called Patriarch Wang of Stone Buddha [village] (*Shifo Wangzu* 石佛王祖).[32] This teacher, who is mostly called *Dharma* King (*Fawang* 法王), was regarded by Gongchang as one of his forerunners. In a sequence of divine manifestations, which begins with *Wuji Shengzu* (Holy Patriarch Limitless), the Dharma King Stone Buddha (*Fawang Shifo* 法王石佛) is listed as the fourth and successor to *Huangji Shengzu* (Holy Patriarch August Ultimate). Gongchang himself holds the sixth position preceded by Cuihua Zhang Jie 翠花張姐 (Cuihua Elder Sister Zhang).[33]

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[30] *Longhua jing,* ch. 17, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 711a/b, ch. 20, p. 721a/b.

[31] *Longhua jing,* ch. 22, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 733b.

[32] *Longhua jing,* ch. 5, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 600b. The translation of this title is open to interpretation. In other contexts (cf. ch. 12, p. 688a) the same person is called *Shifoyu lao fawang* 石佛域老法王 (Venerable Dharma-King of Stone-Buddha place). Thus, Wang can be interpreted as a title ("king") or as a surname.

[33] *Longhua jing,* ch. 16, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 704a. *Wuji Shengzu* is implicitly equated with Dīpaṃkara and *Huangji Shengzu* with Maitreya. The same identification is found in the *Jiulian baojuan,* cf. above p. 284. It should be recalled that already in Patriarch Luo's writings the symbol *Wuji Shengzu* occurs referring to the Absolute, which is also called *Mother* and *Emptiness* (cf. above p. 221).

It was she who had introduced Gongchang to the Dharma King Stone Buddha.[34]

This information allows to identify the sectarian tradition to which Gongchang and the *Longhua jing* belonged. The Dharma King Stone Buddha is mentioned in two other *baojuan*[35] and it appears that he is no other than Wang Sen, one of the most influential sect leaders in north China in the early seventeenth century.[36]

The centre of Wang Sen's sect was in Shifokou 石佛口 (Stone Buddha Mouth), a village in Luanzhou 灤州, Yongping 永平 prefecture in Zhili. The sect was popularly called *Wenxiang jiao* (Incense Smeller Teaching), but also called *Hongfeng jiao* 弘封教 (Vast Seal Teaching) or *Dacheng jiao* (Great Vehicle Teaching). Its network extended to six provinces as far as Sichuan, with a membership of over two million.[37]

As leader of a vast sectarian network, Wang Sen had amassed a huge fortune; his wealth had raised him to the position of owner of great estates that secured him considerable influence among the populace in Zhili and the capital area. The accumulation of enormous wealth was possible through the financial contributions of the sect members. Four times a year money was collected at the level of the local assemblies and then channelled through the hierarchy up to the central leadership in Shifokou. The local congregation with membership of some tens or hundreds were headed by a staff of leaders. There were several intermediary levels, and the leaders of major subbranches controlled tens of thousands members.[38] Thus, given an overall membership of hundreds of thousands, even small contributions of individual members accumulated to considerable sums. Since some of this money

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[34] *Longhua jing*, ch. 24, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 742a.

[35] *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan*, introduction, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 840b-841a; ch. 10, p. 900b; *Xiaoshi jiexu lianzong baojuan*, ch. 11, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 533a, where the sect founded by him is called the *Dacheng Yuandun famen* 大乘圓頓法門.

[36] For biographical information on Wang Sen cf. Li Jixian 李濟賢, "Bailian jiaozhu Wang Sen, Wang Haoxian bu shi nongmin qiyi lingxiu 白蓮教主王森王好賢不是農民起義領袖," *Wen shi* 文史, 18 (1982), pp. 147–158; Ma/Han, pp. 549–570.

[37] *Canweizi ji* 餐微子集, by Yue Hesheng 岳和聲 (Mingji shiliao jizhen 明季史料集珍), Taibei: Weiwen Tushu chubanshe, 1977, pp. 648 f). The exact name of the sect is here given as *Dacheng hongtong jiao* 大乘弘通教 or *Hongfeng jiao*. It should be noted that Wang Sen was also called *Wuwei zhu* (Master of the *Wuwei* [teaching]), which may imply some relationships with the Luo traditions (*Canweizi ji*, *j.* 4, p. 418). Cf. also *Shuo lüe* 説略, by Huang Zunsu 黃尊素 (Hanfenlou miji 涵芬樓秘笈; 2), Taibei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1967, 21b/22a.

[38] *Canweizi ji*, *j.* 4, p. 617.

was kept at every level of the hierarchy, local and regional leaders had not only prestigious but also lucrative positions that could be further improved by winning new converts. And leaders at the top level became wealthy and powerful. The system resembled in some way the tax system of a state, and Wang Sen was, as it were, the ruler of a sectarian kingdom. However, there were some hazards both from within and from without. Internally the system depended on the loyalty of the leaders who could be tempted to establish their own kingdoms, and externally it depended on the policy of the state administration and its officials.

In 1512 a major conflict developed among the top leadership that entailed a split of the sect. Li Guoyong 李國用, a senior disciple of Wang Sen's, had embezzled money destined for building a pagoda and in the following conflict revolted against Wang. With other leaders and a considerable number of sect members he refused to accept Wang Sen's authority and separated to establish his own sect. The two rivalling sectarian groups engaged in a fierce feud with members even killing each other. Finally, in 1514 the authorities intervened and arrested Wang Sen, Li Guoyong, and others.[39] Perhaps because he could bribe the officials, Wang Sen was soon released. However, when some years later one of the sectarian groups belonging to his network rebelled during a famine, Wang Sen was arrested again and sentenced to strangulation. He died in prison in the year 1519.[40]

Wang Sen's *Dacheng jiao* was a huge sectarian network whose control demanded great skills in organization. Wang certainly was a capable organizer, but the ambitions of other leaders who commanded the loyalty of their own followers could easily lead to divisions. This was a structural problem of most extended sectarian organizations, which unlike state administration could not rely on the open use of force to secure subordination of their subjects. In legal terms sectarian groups were illegal organizations that depended on the toleration of officials, which made it difficult to develop enduring structures. Personal charisma of the leaders and loyalty to them thus played a much more important role than in official institutions. It is therefore not surprising that after Wang Sen's death his sect split into various branches. This process was reinforced by an event that occurred three years later. In 1622, a major rebellion of *Dacheng jiao* groups erupted, which in the words of

[39] *Shuo lüe*, 22a/b .

[40] *Shuo lüe*, 22b/23a; *Canweizi ji*, *j.* 4, p. 616.

the official who was charged with its suppression was the "most serious crisis in the dynasty's two-hundred and sixty-year history."[41] The leader of this rebellion was Xu Hongru 徐鴻儒, a former disciple of Wang Sen's who had taken control of one of the major branches. He joined forces with Wang Sen's son Wang Haoxian 王好賢, who was the leader of another *Dacheng* group. Xu Hongru claimed that the rebels controlled a force of over two million. They posed a serious threat to a government already weakened by Manchu attacks in the North and troubled by a severe economical crisis. Several cities were captured by the rebels before government troops finally managed to subdue the uprising. Xu Hongru was executed as well as Wang Haoxian who had fled to the South without having played a leading role in the rebellion.[42]

For the Ming government this uprising was the prelude to the more successful rebellion of Li Zicheng 李自成 and the termination of the dynasty by Manchu forces in 1644. For the *Dacheng jiao* it was the beginning of more clandestine forms of existence. The suppression of the rebellion and ensuing persecution of sect members destroyed what might have remained of a centralized organization after Wang Sen's death. Leaders of subbranches, whether they had been involved in the uprising or not, had to go into hiding to reorganize their sectarian groups. Among the remnants of Wang Sen's *Dacheng jiao* was a sect led by a woman called Cuihua of the Zhang family.[43] She had formerly introduced Gongchang to Wang Sen, and it was probably this branch of the *Dacheng jiao* to which Gongchang first belonged.[44] However, he

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[41] Memorial by Zhao Yan 趙彥 quoted in Shek, *Religion and society in late Ming*, p. 352.

[42] For the Xu Hongru uprising see Shek, *Religion and society in late Ming*, pp. 352–367; Ma/Han, pp. 570–574.

[43] The centre of this branch seems to have been in Peking. In 1816 a sect member confessed that in Peking there was a branch of the *Luojiao* under the leadership of a Zhang family living in Cuihua lane (*Cuihua hutong* 萃花胡同) where they had a buddha hall (*ZPZZ*, Jiaqing 21/2/9 [1816], memorial by Nayancheng 那彥成, quoted below on p. 400). This shows that leadership in Cuihua's sect was transmitted within her family for at least two hundred years. It is also probable that Zhang was the surname of her husband and Cuihua her style, since in the *Longhua jing* she is referred to as Cuihua Zhang Jie (Cuihua Elder Sister Zhang) or simply Cuihua, but never called Zhang Cuihua.

[44] Cuihua is listed as successor of the Dharma King Stone Buddha (i.e. Wang Sen) and precursor of Gongchang in *Longhua jing*, ch. 16 (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 704a). It should be remarked that here Gongchang and the Venerable Patriarch *Tianzhen* appear as two different persons. The *Tianzhen* Patriarch is inserted between the Dharma King of Stone Buddha village and Cuihua. In the *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan* (ch. 20, in

had more in mind than simply continuing a particular sect. Just as the *Longhua jing* claimed to be the completion of all former teachings, Gongchang attempted to bring together all sectarian traditions. His hagiographic biography, which is part of the *Longhua jing*, recounts that he travelled to distant provinces as far as Sichuan to spread his teaching. Wherever he arrived he was welcomed by members of local sects and in this way enlarged his own organization.[45] Many of the local sects that he visited presumably belonged to what was left of Wang Sen's *Dacheng jiao* network, but it seems that Gongchang also contacted sectarian groups of other traditions. For the *Longhua jing* lists eighteen different sects and their founders as all partaking in the Heavenly Truth (*tianzhen*) and leading humankind to salvation.[46] Among them are *Hongyang jiao* founded by Piaogao, *Wuwei jiao* founded by Patriarch Luo, *Huangtian jiao* founded by Pujing and *Dacheng jiao* founded by the Stone Buddha Patriarch, who is probably Wang Sen. We shall see below that the *Longhua jing* integrates teachings of these and other sects of the sixteenth century that all were part of the same sectarian milieu. The enormous growth of Wang Sen's organization and the alleged two million followers of Xu Hongru were hardly possible without extending the networks to already existing sectarian groups.[47] Hence, interaction between them was boosted and when in the aftermath of the rebellion sectarian groups had to reorganize, the boundaries of former traditions were further weakened. It was in this situation of regrouping that Gongchang built his own organization and shaped his own teaching, which thus brought together various traditions.

MJZJ, vol. 5, p. 900b/901a), which is roughly contemporary to the *Longhua jing*. Gongchang is also preceded by *Tianzhen* and Cuihua. Since the identity of Gongchang and *Tianzhen* is clearly stated in other contexts this is puzzling. The solution may be that incarnation of divine beings in humans was no singular event and several sect leaders were considered divine manifestations. The *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan* gives the additional information that the (first) *Tianzhen* Patriarch was born in a place called Erlonghe 二龍河 (Two Dragons River) and concealed his name. Incidentally the same is said about the divine messenger and author (?) of the *Jiulian jing* (ch. 22, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 222). Thus, it may be that the sect leader who produced the *Jiulian jing*, whose central deity was also called Ancient Heavenly Truth (*Gu Tianzhen*), was considered a former incarnation of *Tianzhen* and Gongchang as a later one.

[45] *Longhua jing*, ch. 11, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 681b-687a.

[46] *Longhua jing*, ch. 23, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 736a-737b.

[47] The mechanisms of rapidly growing networks through inclusion of existing groups have been analysed in detail by Susan Naquin in her study of the 1813 *Bagua* uprising (*Millenarian rebellion in China*, chapter 2).

The deliberate synthesis of several sectarian traditions was however not only based on the increased interaction of individuals belonging to different sects within the same milieu. It also depended on the availability of a literary tradition that by the early seventeenth century comprised a considerable number of *baojuan.* These sacred scriptures were objects of high prestige since they contained revelations of the heavenly truth transmitted by the various manifestations of divine messengers. Wang Sen, who was wealthy enough to collect all kinds of treasures, had accumulated a great number of scriptures, which enhanced his status as sectarian leader; at the same time it shows that scriptures of different sects were taken as belonging to a common tradition. The *Longhua jing* refers to Wang Sen's book collection when it narrates that Gongchang went to Stone Buddha Village to collect the twelve hundred scriptures that the Venerable Dharma King had stored there. This was in the year 1541.[48] The number of twelve hundred is probably not to be taken literally, but it shows that scriptures were numerous and played an important role within the sectarian milieu. For Gongchang they formed the base of his synthesis of sectarian traditions, which he elaborated in the *Longhua jing.*

The name of the branch established by Gongchang was *Dacheng tianzhen yuandun zongmen* 大乘天真圓頓宗門 (Great Vehicle school of heavenly truth and complete and sudden [enlightenment]).[49] This is a combination of symbols that occur in the names of various other sects. Sect names could easily change and it does not seem that this name was particularly important to the members.[50] After all, a central message of the *Longhua jing* was that all teachings are founded on the same single truth.[51] More important than the name *Yuandun jiao* was another designation: *Lotus School* (*Lianzong* 蓮宗). It occurs regularly in the *Longhua jing* and refers to the whole tradition of divine revelations.[52] This name, of course, recalls White Lotus Teaching, which however is never mentioned in the text. But in official sources, Wang Sen's *Dacheng*

[48] *Longhua jing,* ch. 12, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 688a/b. The absolute chronology of Gongchang's life has been reconstructed by Sawada (*Kōchū Haja shōben*, pp. 196 f).

[49] *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan,* introduction, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 841b.

[50] There was another designation for Gongchang's sect branch that appears more often: *Hongmei* 紅梅 (Red Plum). Cf. *Longhua jing,* ch. 16, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 704b.

[51] *Longhua jing,* ch. 24, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, pp. 738a-739b.

[52] See particularly chapter 16, which is entitled "The patriarchs succeed in the Lotus School" (*MJZJ,* vol. 5, pp. 703b-706a).

jiao, which was involved in the notorious Xu Hongru uprising of 1622, was normally called *Bailian jiao*[53] and became a paradigm of politically subversive sects. Also some modern scholars are inclined to see in this sectarian tradition an example of so-called White Lotus sects as distinguished from the presumably more peaceful sects of the Luo tradition.[54] It is not possible, however, to maintain such a distinction. The sectarian milieu in which Wang Sen's *Dacheng jiao* and Gongchang's *Yuandun jiao* were rooted comprised all major traditions of north China, including that of Patriarch Luo.

The Longhua jing in the context of baojuan literature

When Gongchang composed the *Longhua jing*, he strongly relied on earlier scriptures of this common tradition. A detailed analysis would probably make it possible to identify the main lines of transmission and to reconstruct more clearly the relative influence of particular scriptures than can be done here. I am confining the following description to more general observations to show the mutual dependency of scriptures originating from various sects. It will become clear, so I hope, that even in late Ming sectarian *baojuan* did not express singular beliefs of individual sects but were part of a literary tradition that demands intertextual reading.

The most conspicous reference to an earlier scripture is the title of the *Longhua jing* (in full: *Gufo Tianzhen kaozheng Longhua baojing*), which is reminiscent of the *Gufo Tianzhen shouyuan jieguo Longhua baochan* 古佛天真收圓結果龍華寶懺 (*Precious Dragon-Flower Scripture of Repentance of the Ancient Buddha Heavenly Truth about Attaining Completion as Karmic Results*), which predates the *Longhua jing* by some decades.[55] Here we not only find the name *Dragon-Flower Scripture* but also the Ancient Buddha Heavenly Truth (*Tianzhen Gufo*), one of whose incarnations later became

[53] *Canweizi ji*, ch. 4, p. 649.

[54] For the problems connected with the distinction of "White Lotus sects" and "Luo sects" see Seiwert, "Popular religious sects in south-east China: Sect connections and the problem of the Luo Jiao/Bailian Jiao dichotomy."

[55] Short title: *Longhua baochan*. A Guangxu edition (1896) of this text is reprinted in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 749–834. A *Longhua chanjing* 龍華懺經 is said to have been presented to the emperor in 1599, cf. preface (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 751). I doubt that this was the *Longhua baochan* in its present form since it probably originated in a sect where Pujing and Pushan (i.e. Wang Changsheng) were revered as patriarchs. Hence it must have been composed after 1604, the year of Wang Changsheng's enlightenment (see above p. 316, note 187), but before the *Longhua jing*.

Gongchang. The *Longhua baochan* presents the same teaching of salvation as the *Longhua jing:* Mankind has fallen into sin, which is the cause of all misery and disasters, and salvation is made possible through the compassion of the Ancient Buddha who reveals the saving truth contained in this scripture.[56] While the structure is the same, some names are different. Whereas in the *Longhua jing* it is *Wuji Gufo* and *Wusheng Laomu* who reside in the Palace of the Great Dipper and initiate the work of salvation, in the *Longhua baochan* it is *Tianzhen Gufo.* If we read the two texts together, we see that the symbols are changeable. To understand the meaning of the message, particular symbols and names are secondary, the meaning is contained in its structure, which remains the same. On the other hand, intertextual reading shows that the same names may occur in different positions. The *Longhua baochan* recounts that *Tianzhen Gufo* orders the Golden Lad and the Jade Maiden (*jintong yunü* 金童玉女) to open the treasury and to take out the Dragon-Flower Scripture, while in the *Longhua jing* it is *Tianzhen Gufo* himself who takes the scripture from the celestial treasure house, apparently on advise of *Wusheng Laomu.* Again, the structure of the mythological narratives is the same, but at the same time it is implied that they should not be taken literally. In any case, there was no need to take them literally for those enlightened readers who understood that the mythological images refer to one undifferentiated reality. It is only when the various functions of the Absolute are described in narratives that names are necessary, but since they essentially refer to the same reality they may appear in different positions.

The author of the *Longhua baochan* seems to have belonged to the *Huangtian jiao,* or more precisely, to that branch of the *Huangtian jiao* where Pujing and Pushan, alias Wang Changsheng, were regarded as patriarchs.[57] This branch was also known as *Yuandun jiao,*[58] the name that later was used for Gongchang's sect. Influence of the *Huangtian jiao* on the *Longhua jing* can also be derived from other points.[59] Most remarkably, the name Gongchang can be found in a *Huangtian jiao* scripture

[56] *Longhua baochan,* ch. 3, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, pp. 757b-758b.

[57] Cf. *Longhua baochan,* ch. 3, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, pp. 758b-759a.

[58] *Longhua jing,* ch. 23, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 737a. The name *Yuandun jiao* was already used by Pujing for his teaching (*Pujing baojuan,* ch. 1, in *BJCJ,* vol. 5, p. 6).

[59] The symbol of the *Tianzhen Gufo* (Ancient Buddha of Heavenly Truth) has its parallel in the *Puming baojuan* where it is stated that the Ancient Buddha has revealed the Great Way of Heavenly Truth (*tianzhen dadao*) (*Puming baojuan*, in *BJCJ,* vol. 4, p. 380).

where it refers to the mediator and verifier of the divine truth who is venerated as "our Lord Buddha" (*wode foye* 我的佛爺).[60] Thus, it appears that Gongchang, the author of the *Longhua jing*, chose a pseudonym to assume a role that was already defined in the *Huangtian jiao* tradition and possibly even beyond.

The *Huangtian jiao* grew out of a sectarian milieu where *neidan* practices of meditation were emphasized. We find the same emphasis in the *Longhua jing* where the Mother teaches Gongchang a "cultivation method in ten steps" (*shibu xiuxing*).[61] While the method of the ten steps is not mentioned in *Huangtian* scriptures, we can trace it further back to the *Jiulian jing*, which describes *neidan* practices as part of the "cultivation method in ten steps" (*shibu xiuxing*),[62] and even to the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* of 1430, where the cultivation method in ten steps (*shibu xiuxing*) is described as the way leading to salvation. Although the ten steps in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* are not the same as in the *Longhua jing*, they include practices of meditation to realize complete enlightenment. Cultivation methods systematized in ten steps were apparently widespread in sectarian milieus. The *Longhua jing* was just continuing this tradition. While the concrete content of these steps was variable, practices of meditation were always part of it.

The *Jiulian jing* was particularly important not only for the *Longhua jing*,[63] but also in Wang Sen's *Dacheng jiao*, where it was transmitted and an enlarged version was written.[64] The *Jiulian jing* predates the *Longhua jing* by roughly one hundred and fifty years. Here we find already many of the symbols that became central in Gongchang's scripture. *Tianzhen* (Heavenly Truth) appears as a symbol standing for the Absolute and the source of all that exists. But it is made clear that this is just a conventional designation. It may equally be called *Wuji* (Limitless), Laozi or *Gu Tianzhen* (Venerable Heavenly Truth). At the same time

[60] *Pujing baojuan*, ch. 10, in *BJCJ*, vol. 5, p. 81.

[61] *Longhua jing*, ch. 15 (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, 700b). The method is also called *shijian xiuxing*, cf. above p. 371.

[62] *Jiulian jing*, ch. 3, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 47. The method is also called *Shibu gong*, cf. above pp. 287 f.

[63] The *Longhua jing* (ch. 15, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 701a) refers to the *Jiulian jing* as "Scripture of the nine-petalled lotus" (*Jiuye lian jing* 九葉蓮經).

[64] In 1732, there was an investigation of the *Dacheng* jiao* 大成教 of the Wang family in Shifokou. Among the scriptures found there were two versions of the *Jiulian jing:* "Old *Jiulian*" and "Continued *Jiulian*" (source quoted in Ma/Han, p. 593). For the two versions of the *Jiulian jing* and their dates of origins see appendix.

all distinctions are negated, the buddhas of the past, the present, and the future, or *Wuji*, *Taiji*, and *Huangji*, are one single body. Since on the other hand *Wuji* is just another designation for *Tianzhen*, these different names all refer to the same ultimate reality.[65] If we read the *Longhua jing* together with the *Jiulian jing*, which without doubt was known to Gongchang, then the meaning of the symbol *Tianzhen Gufo* (Venerable Buddha Heavenly Truth) becomes more manifest. It is one of the names given to the Absolute, particularly in its function as divine manifestation teaching the way to salvation.[66] We would certainly misunderstand the *Longhua jing* if we took the mythological narratives as describing a polytheistic system of divine beings acting in heaven and on earth like the gods in Greek mythology. Of course, the narratives can be understood that way and many readers probably did so, but this was the exoteric dimension of the teaching. For the initiated and enlightened, who had become familiar with the esoteric dimensions of the tradition and verified them through their practice of *neidan* meditation, it was a monistic or possibly a monotheistic system, where there was only one single divine reality.

Since the influence of the *Jiulian jing* on the *Longhua jing* cannot be doubted, we have evidence of the continuity of popular religious teachings. It allows the conclusion that the various sects founded in the sixteenth century do not mark the beginning of a new religious tradition. They were continuations and new condensations of beliefs and practices that had a longer history than it appears when we concentrate on the *baojuan* written by sixteenth century sect founders. The *Longhua jing* claimed to "continue the Lotus School," but the same claim we find in the *Jiulian jing*.[67] And as early as in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* of 1430 the believers are admonished to dot the Mysterious Pass in order "to continue the Lotus School" and not to follow heretical teachings.[68] Thus, the *Longhua jing* refers to a tradition that two centuries earlier had already a history: As early as in the first half of the fifteenth century, there existed competing sectarian groups tracing their history back to earlier precedents; and the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* makes it clear

[65] See above p. 369.

[66] *Jiulian jing*, ch. 11 (*BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 206 f) states that *Tianzhen* leads all men out of the world of suffering.

[67] *Jiulian jing*, introduction, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 11.

[68] *Foshuo huangji jieguo baojuan*, ch. 9, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, pp. 328 f.

that it relied on an older tradition of *baojuan* scriptures.[69] Since there is no reason to doubt this information, we can conclude that the late Ming sects were rooted in a sectarian milieu that for centuries was part of the Chinese religious landscape.

However, the continuity of sectarian milieus with their own literary traditions is not the same as the continuity of particular sects as social organizations. We certainly cannot consider Gongchang's *Yuandun jiao* as the offshoot of a sect whose history can be traced back to the *Jiulian jing* or even the *Huangji jieguo baojuan.* The *Longhua jing*, as other *baojuan* before it, affirmed the existence of continuing traditions while at the same time claiming to represent the completion of earlier teachings. We may take the *Longhua jing* as a new scriptural crystallization of symbols and beliefs floating within the religious symbol space. In the sectarian milieus certain symbols were condensed to clusters and structures that gave them a distinct meaning and expressed particular beliefs. In scriptures, these beliefs were further condensed and given material form. Beliefs crystallized in written texts were in a certain way also fossilized. Scriptures could be preserved even if the particular sects in which they were composed and transmitted disappeared. The existence of particular scriptures is therefore no proof of the continuity of certain sectarian organizations. It is not the existence of enduring sects that constitutes the sectarian milieu, but the condensation of certain symbols and beliefs. In most cases the social networks in which these beliefs were exchanged were only limited and ephemeral, and did not develop into well organized and enduring sectarian organizations. It does not seem that any of the sectarian groups that doubtless existed in early Ming survived as a social institution, although further research will probably trace back some late Ming sects to earlier origins.[70] What did

[69] *Huangji jieguo baojuan,* introduction, in *BJCJ,* vol. 10, p. 227.

[70] One candidate for tracing the early history to the fifteenth century is the *Western Dacheng Jiao* (*Xi Dacheng jiao*): The *Longhua jing* (ch. 23, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 736b) mentions a *Xi Taicheng jiao* 西太乘教 founded by Bodhisattva Lü (Lü pusa 呂普薩). Bodhisattva Lü, also called Lü Huangsheng zu 呂皇聖祖, was said to be a manifestation of Guanyin (ch. 7, p. 668b). The *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan* (introduction, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 841a) attributes the *Pudu xinsheng baojuan* 普度新生寶卷 (*Precious Scroll on Universal Salvation and New Life*) to her. In this scripture (quoted in Ma/Han, p. 656), it is reported that she was born in 1392 as a manifestation of *Wusheng Laomu.* Even if it must be doubted that the nun Lü, who lived in early Ming and is the historical kernel of the Bodhisattva Lü, was the founder of the *Xi Dacheng jiao* (cf. Ma/Han, pp. 651–663), it is clear that at least this sect claimed to have been founded that early.—Also the

survive, however, were the compounds of symbols and beliefs that were the ground on which time and again new sectarian groups grew.

Most symbols used in the sectarian milieus were not exclusive to them but known also in other religious traditions. They acquired their specific meaning within the sectarian milieu where they were arranged in new contexts. A good example is Amitābha who was a focus of popular Buddhist piety and regularly appears in sectarian writings, from the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* to the *Longhua jing*.[71] Other symbols commonly known in non-sectarian contexts include *Wuji* (Limitless), *Zhenkong* (True Emptiness), *Wusheng* (Unborn), *Zhen* (Truth, i.e. True Reality) and certain honorific titles such as *Gufo* (Ancient Buddha) and *Zu* (Patriarch). In sectarian scriptures, they all acquire specific meanings that are different from what they signify in most other contexts. When used in mythological narratives they usually refer to personalized concepts of the Absolute, such as the Ancient Buddha Limitless (*Wuji Gufo*) who with the Unborn Venerable Mother (*Wusheng Laomu*) resides in the Great Dipper Palace.[72] On other occasions they denote the impersonal Absolute when for instance the *Longhua jing* forms the combination *Wuji Zhenkong* (Limitless True Emptiness) that through transformation produces heaven and earth.[73] These symbols are in various combinations common in most sectarian *baojuan*. The writings of Patriarch Luo are no exception. Although in Luo Menghong's scriptures the impersonal aspects of the Absolute are emphasized as in the symbol *Zhenkong* (True Emptiness), he also talks of *Wuji Shengzu* (Holy Patriarch Limitless) as a personal deity and on other occasions uses the symbol *Mother* (*Mu* or *Niang*).[74] And like Gongchang and other sect founders, Patriarch Luo was considered an incarnation of the Divine by his followers, in

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Hongyang jiao* claimed to continue sectarian traditions of the early Ming. See above p. 326.

[71] Cf. *Longhua jing*, ch. 2, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 654b. Here Amitābha appears as the first manifestation of the heavenly truth undergoing several transformations until it incarnates in Gongchang. Kerr (*Precious scrolls in Chinese popular religious culture*, p. 263) has Maitreya instead of Amitābha. Since Kerr also translates *Maitreya* on other occasions where the editions available to me have *Amitābha* (pp. 284, 287, 289, 290), it may be that in the edition used by her *Amitābha* is replaced by *Maitreya*. This could mean that some sects transmitting the *Longhua jing* attempted to stress the role of Maitreya and substituted it for Amitābha.

[72] *Longhua jing*, ch. 2, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 653b.

[73] *Longhua jing*, ch. 2, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 650a.

[74] Cf. above p. 221.

this case of *Wuji Shengzu*.[75] This clearly shows that his movement was not outside the sectarian milieu. It is not surprising, therefore, that the *Longhua jing* included Patriarch Luo and his sect in its list of former manifestations of the heavenly truth.

The ambivalence of key concepts that are presented as personal deities in one context, but as abstract principles in another is certainly irritating and makes interpretation ambiguous. However, the same ambivalence exists also in the orthodox traditions of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. In Buddhism, the idea of all beings possessing buddha nature and the negation of all distinctions did not exclude the worship of buddhas and bodhisattvas and the desire of being reborn in Amitābha's Western Paradise. And in Daoism, the *Dao* was at the same time conceived as impersonal and without attributes, and represented in anthropomorphic symbols. In sectarian literature we find the same ambiguity, which allowed to understand them according to one's own preferences and insight. We may suppose that in popular religious milieus, where anthropomorphic gods were common, narratives of personal deities were more easily understood than abstract notions of an ultimate reality and the denial of distinctions. But we also have to take into account that enlightenment reached through elaborate practices of meditation was the final goal of many sectarian teachings. Thus, the *Longhua jing* and other *baojuan* should not be reduced to their mythological images, as did Huang Yupian in his criticism.

Since abstract concepts are more difficult to describe and conceive than personal deities, mythological narratives dominate most *baojuan*. Without doubt this conformed with the understanding of most readers. It corresponds to the popular forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism where devotion to personal deities including Amitābha and Guanyin was more common than contemplating the emptiness of all *dharmas*. The model of Amitābha and Guanyin without doubt influenced sectarian beliefs. Describing salvation as returning to the Native Place echoes rebirth in Amitābha's Pure Land,[76] and in some early *baojuan* the Ancient Buddha (*Gufo*) is occasionally called Amitābha.[77] But unlike Amitābha

[75] *Kugong wudao baojuan buzhu Kaixin fayao*, vol. 1, *shou*, p. 7 f.

[76] The mundane world is usually called the *Eastern Land* as contrasted to the Native Place, which is implicitly or explicitly associated with the West like Amitābha's Western Paradise (cf. *Longhua jing*, ch. 2, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 651a). In the *Jiulian jing*, ch. 13 (*BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 260) the Native Place, where the children meet the Mother, is called *Pure Land*.

[77] The *Huangji jieguo baojuan* states that the Ancient Amitābha constantly manifests

in orthodox Buddhism, in these texts the Ancient Buddha has all attributes that in the *Longhua jing* belong to *Wuji Gufo* and *Wusheng Laomu*: He is the creator and source of all and a compassionate deity that sorrowful watches its children who have fallen into the world of sin. In the fifteenth century Amitābha seems to have been a common symbol for the Absolute as personal creator in whose heavenly realm salvation was sought. As creative principle it was called *Wusheng Fumu* (Unborn Parents) and men were considered to be children of Amitābha Buddha.[78] Luo Menghong rejects these beliefs, arguing that Amitābha is male and cannot give birth to children.[79] Instead, he uses other symbols to denote the creative principle: *Wuji Shengzu* (Holy Patriarch Limitless) who out of compassion appears in the world to save all beings from the cycle of rebirth. He is identified with the female symbol *Mother* (*Mu*), which reflects the creative force of *Wuji Shengzu*. Thus, Patriarch Luo on the one hand refutes the identification of the Absolute with Amitābha or with any other deity of the common pantheon, while on the other he lays the ground for the double symbol of *Wuji Shengzu* and *Mu*. The same doubling is found in *Longhua jing* with *Wuji Gufo* and *Wusheng Laomu*, which are combined as *Wusheng Fumu* (Unborn Parents). Intertextual reading shows that behind the mythological narratives of the *Longhua jing* are ideas similar to what Patriarch Luo expressed in more sober language.

The symbols used in sectarian *baojuan* to denote the Absolute, from which all men originate and to which they should return, are numerous. What is unspeakable and without attributes can be called by many names if spoken about. A symbol frequently found is *Wusheng*, which is conventionally translated as "unborn". Since in sectarian writings it often occurs in the combination *Wusheng Laomu* (Unborn Venerable Mother) there is a certain temptation to treat *Wusheng* as an abridged form of *Wusheng Laomu*. In many instances this may be the case; one should not ignore, however, that in Buddhist scriptures the symbol *Wusheng* stands for an abstract concept. It signifies the undifferentiated state of no-birth-and no-death, that is, *nirvāṇa*, or more precisely the

in the world (ch. 3, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 269). In the *Jiulian jing* the *Wuwei* patriarch is called Amitābha. He has transformed many times to appear in the world (ch. 11, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 205 f).

[78] Cf. *Kugong wudao juan, in BJCJ, vol.* 1, pp. 110–114.

[79] *Zhengxin chuyi wuxiu zheng zizai baojuan*, ch. 16, in *BJCJ*, vol. 3, pp. 200 f.

state that transcends the distinction between *nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra*.[80] Likewise, in sectarian *baojuan* the symbol *Wusheng* is sometimes used in the abstract sense of realizing the state of no-birth-and-no-death, that is enlightenment.[81] Hence, *Wusheng Laomu* may be interpreted not only as *Unborn Venerable Mother* but also as the personalization of the state of *Wusheng*, or *Venerable Mother Wusheng*.[82] The term *Wusheng Laomu* would in this case be analogous to *Wuji Gufo* or similar expressions. Thus, the image of returning to *Wusheng Laomu* could be understood literally or symbolically. In the first case it means reaching a heavenly paradise after death, while in the latter it symbolizes enlightenment, or attaining the state of *Wusheng*. Given the crucial role that meditation plays in the *Longhua jing* as the way to salvation, it is evident that for the initiate the Native Place was not to be sought in some other worlds but within oneself through the realization of one's true nature.

There are some tensions between these, as it were, esoteric aspects of sectarian teachings and the more overt mythological images and narratives that could easily be understood by anyone. It appears that these outward aspects were important for gaining new converts and that they even became dominant in some cases. Propagating the teaching demanded to present it in a language to which listeners were accustomed. Personal deities were familiar symbols in all religious traditions. To conceive salvation as returning to the Native Place was just a variation of the common hope of being reborn in Amitābha's Pure Land. In the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* and the *Longhua jing*, the Ancient Buddha was even called Amitābha. Thus, to accept these teachings was at first only a small step away from beliefs that were already familiar. Only after being further initiated into the sect's teachings, the more esoteric aspects gradually exposed. It depended, however, on the individual dispositions to which degree these aspects were sought after. Many members were probably satisfied with the vision of returning to the Native Place after death or being among those who will be rescued from impending apocalyptic events. Practising meditation and striving for enlightenment certainly was confined to limited circles within extended sectarian net-

[80] Cf. p. 303, note 151.

[81] E.g. *Jiulian jing*, ch. 11 (*BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 206), translated above p. 284.

[82] This seems to be implied when the *Pujing baojuan* uses the expression *Wusheng zhi mu* (see above p. 302). It should be recalled that *laomu* is a honorific appellation for an elder woman that not in the first place means "mother." The case is similar as in *Xi Wangmu*, where *wangmu* does not mean "mother of a king" but "venerable old lady."

works. Particularly in phases of rapid growth in membership the majority could hardly be attracted by quietest teachings that were difficult to understand and demanded intensive meditation practice.

This had certain consequences for the outward appearance of sectarian groups and their perception by officials and other observers. People like Huang Yupian, who as a Confucian official read an enormous number of sectarian *baojuan*, could not but be outraged by scriptures that seemed to be full of contradictions and ignorance. From his point of view the mythological narratives appeared as pure nonsense. Most external observers and critics even did not know the scriptures, and if they did, they remained at the surface of the mythological narratives.[83] The picture they had of popular religious sects was not based on an understanding of their scriptures and teachings but on their experience with sects as officials or literati. This was a very selective experience since official investigations of sectarian groups were above all interested in their supposed or actual subversive potential. The *Dacheng jiao* uprising of 1622 reinforced the perception of popular religious movements as a threat to political order and stability. When in the aftermath of this and other revolts officials interrogated captured rebels, they usually were not interested in the subtleties of sectarian teachings. And often it would not even have been possible to get information about them, because most participants in such mass movements were only shortly recruited and had themselves just a superficial knowledge of the sect's teachings. What they knew and what became generally known were the slogans used to mobilize the fervour of the masses. Like any good propaganda of war these slogans were not sophisticated but used very restricted codes. And they tried to appeal to moods and expectations that were widespread rather than to beliefs upheld only by a minority. The impression of sectarian beliefs gained in this way reflected at best those aspects that were easy to communicate in popular religious milieus, but certainly not the more demanding elements of sectarian teachings.

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[83] To give an impression of Huang Yupian's superficial understanding of the *Longhua jing* He criticises the mythological account of Fuxi and Nüwa who as ancestors of humankind gave birth to the ninety-six *yi* 億 sons and daughters of the august womb. His argument is that one *yi* amounts to hundred thousand. Thus, Nüwa and Fuxi, who lived for not more than some hundred years, would have given birth to nine million and six hundred thousand children, which Huang correctly declares as unbelievable (*Poxie xiangbian*, in: Sawada, *Kōchū Haja shōben*, p. 21). Obviously, Huang Yupian made no attempt to understand even common mythological language. Much less was he able to grasp the more subtle meanings of sectarian religious literature.

Among the beliefs that seem to have been widely known and therefore could be used as a mobilizing force was the expectation of Maitreya as the future buddha. It is possible that in the *Dacheng jiao* rebellion this belief played a certain role since Wang Haoxian was considered a manifestation of Maitreya.[84] In any case, during the Qing dynasty the advent of Maitreya was a common theme in many revolts. Thus, the leader of the *Bagua* rebellion in 1813 claimed the role of Maitreya.[85] Maitreya was a key symbol to which officials paid particular attention, since it woke associations to uprisings and particularly to the Han Shantong rebellion at the end of the Yuan dynasty. This rebellion had become the paradigm of the so-called White Lotus sects, and most sects of the Ming and Qing were considered closely associated with the White Lotus. It is not surprising, therefore, that Huang Yupian in his discussion of the *Longhua jing* was instantly caught when he found a reference to Maitreya as presiding the third Dragon-Flower Assembly. He did not hesitate to remark that "The false slogan of today's heterodox sects that 'Maitreya rules the world' has its origin here [i.e. in the *Longhua jing*]."[86]

That Maitreya often occurred in rebellions and other attempts to mobilize followers shows first and foremost that this symbol was generally known. Propaganda referring to the coming of Maitreya had therefore some appeal to prospective converts. However, to use Maitreya in propaganda for rebellion does not necessarily imply that belief in Maitreya's descent belonged to the core teachings of the sects involved. When Huang Yupian saw the *Longhua jing* as the origin of the expectation of Maitreya, he apparently projected certain stereotypes about popular religious sects of his own time back to the Ming dynasty. For, as we have seen, the symbol of Maitreya presiding the Dragon-Flower Assembly is anything but central in the teaching of the *Longhua jing*. There were many forms of Dragon-Flower Assemblies, and those held by the buddhas of the three cosmic periods seem to be more a literary topos than a belief of high significance. More important, Maitreya appears in the *Longhua jing* not as the buddha of the future but as belonging to the past. For he is succeeded by the Venerable Patriarch Heavenly Truth (*Tianzhen laozu*) who establishes the teaching in the

[84] *Canweizi ji, j.* 4, p. 618.

[85] Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China,* p. 92.

[86] *Poxie xiangbian*, in: Sawada, *Kōchū Haja shōben,* p. 20.

present time.[87] There is not a single reference in the scripture to Maitreya as the expected future ruler of the world.[88] Maitreya is far from occupying a central position in the *Longhua jing*.

The same is true for earlier *baojuan* used by Gongchang. The succession of the three cosmic periods ruled by Dīpaṃkara, Śākyamuni and Maitreya, which in most scriptures is taken for granted, does not appear to refer to any millenarian expectations of Maitreya's future descent.[89] Salvation is not conceived as a transformation of the present world into a world of peace and prosperity but as transcending the present world. Rather than denoting a future ruler the symbol Maitreya and its equivalents seem to convey the idea of a new dispensation of the heavenly truth revealed by the divine manifestations of the latter age. Thus, when for example Puming is said to be the Ancient Buddha of August Ultimate (*Huangji Gufo*),[90] who usually is identified with Maitreya, it is not implied that he will rule the world in a literal sense. The new age ushered in by Maitreya or his diverse manifestations is new in a spiritual sense since the saving knowledge has been revealed anew to men who have long lost awareness of their divine origin.

The teaching of the three cosmic periods with Maitreya as the buddha of the third was not confined to a particular sectarian tradition. In a very general sense it was part of the orthodox Buddhist tradition where Maitreya was expected as the future Buddha. And there were also teachings about three cosmic periods divided into countless great and small *kalpas* and the idea of the three disasters (*san zai*) of fire,

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[87] *Longhua jing*, ch. 13, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 693a-694a. Cf. ch. 16 (pp. 703b-705a) where Maitreya is succeeded by the Dharma King of Shifo, *Tianzhen Laozu*, Cuihua Zhang Jie and Gongchang.

[88] Chapter 11 mentions that the believers will go with Gongchang to the Dragon-Flower assembly that takes place at Maitreya's court in the Native Place, from where they will never be reborn (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 686b). This clearly shows that Maitreya's rule over the world is understood as a spiritual rule not as his descending to the world and establishing a millennium.

[89] It is disputable whether the identification of a sect leader with Maitreya can always be interpreted as an indicator of millenarian expectations, as many scholars are inclined to do. In the context of sectarian teachings it is quite common to regard humans as manifestations or incarnations of divine beings. Thus, Wang Sen called himself *Taiji Gufo* (*Shuo lüe*, 32b), which implies an identification with Śākyamuni. His son Wang Haoxian was identified with Maitreya. However, we cannot conclude that this had a millenarian implication. After all, the *Longhua jing* did not consider Maitreya as the future ruler of the world.

[90] *Puming baojuan*, in *BJCJ*, vol. 4, p. 381.

water, and wind occurring at the end of the great *kalpas*.[91] In orthodox Buddhism, these ideas were part of a cosmological scheme that reckoned with aeons of immeasurable length. However, they seem to have circulated widely in various forms and become part of the popular religious lore.[92] The symbols of Maitreya, the three times, numerous *kalpas,* and final catastrophes had distinct meanings in orthodox Buddhist scriptures, but as they floated within the symbol space of Chinese religion they became rearranged and condensed to new clusters where they acquired different meanings. Before they crystallized again in sectarian writings, they probably had already been reshaped in popular beliefs. Although the early *baojuan* in one way or another all refer to the buddhas of the three cosmic times, they appear to have drawn from different sources. For the names of the three periods show considerable variations.[93] Some variant names are homophonous and are probably due to oral transmission. Others may be explained by local variations in popular religious milieus where these beliefs were current. In any case, these differences show that the mutual influence of various sectarian groups and their scriptures did not amount to a complete homogenization of their teachings. The author of the *Longhua jing* made use of other scriptures but he did not simply copy them.

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[91] Cf. *Fozu tongji* (T 2035), *j.* 30, pp. 297–302.

[92] The *Longhua jing* (ch. 22, in *BJCJ,* vol., 5, p. 731b) refers to an apocryphal *Jie liang jing* 劫量經 (*Sūtra on the length of kalpas*) and gives details about the duration of the various *kalpas* and the disasters at their ends.

[93] In the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* (introductory section, in BJCJ, vol. 10, pp. 234 f) we find already the later common sequence of *qingyang, hongyang* and *baiyang* (green, red, and white yang). In the *Jiulian baojuan* there are at least two sequences: *huangyang* 黃陽, *qingyang** 清陽, *hongyang*† 洪陽 (yellow, pure and huge yang) (ch. 12, in BJCJ, vol. 8, pp. 233 f) and *qingyang, huangyang* (green and yellow yang) for the first two periods (ch. 9, p. 160). The assembly of the second period is however also called *baiyang hui* (White Yang Assembly, ch. 12, p. 236). In the *Sanshi yinyou* (j. 2, 29a/b) the first two kalpas are called *huangyang** 黃楊 (yellow willow) and *hongchen* 紅塵 (red dust). In scriptures of the *Hongyang* jiao* we find the sequence *qingyang*, hongyang** 弘陽, *baiyang* (pure, vast, white yang) (cf. *Hongyang kugong wudao jing*, preface, in BJCJ, vol. 15, p. 136 f), whereas scriptures of the *Huangtian jiao* have *qingyang, hongyang, baiyang* as in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* (*Pujing baojuan*, ch. 23, in BJCJ, vol. 5, p. 130). The *Longhua jing* does not use the same terminology to denote the three cosmic times. However, it associates them with lotus flowers of various colours: *qinglian* 青蓮, *honglian* 紅蓮 and *jinlian* 金蓮 (green, red and golden lotus, cf. *Longhua jing,* ch. 12, in MJZJ, vol. 5, p. 693a/b).

Sectarian organizations and continuations

Since Gongchang's sect is not mentioned in other contemporary sources, we have to rely on the *Longhua jing* to get an idea of its social organization. The mutual interaction of sects belonging to the same sectarian milieu and the increasing homogenization of their beliefs did not mean that their identity as religious communities was lost. The more similar individual sects were in terms of beliefs and practices, the more important it became to mark their social identity and the boundaries to other groups. Membership in a particular sect had certain consequences and was therefore clearly defined. For the leaders, committed followers increased their religious and social status as well as their income. For the members being part of a sectarian group ensured them support and protection of their fellow members. Membership status was formally obtained through rituals of initiation which included the transmission of secret mantras and other knowledge not revealed to outsiders. The *Longhua jing* stresses the religious importance of registrations and name marks, which will be necessary after death to be admitted to the celestial realm. Everyone has to know exactly to which branch of the sect she or he belongs and which teacher performed the initiation.[94] In practice, this knowledge was probably necessary to recognize membership mutually. It also shows that lineages of teacher-disciple relationships were considered important as the basic structure of the organization.

The *Longhua jing* lists several sub-branches of the "Lotus School" (*Lianzong*). They all continue the line of transmission following the buddhas of the three cosmic times. Here, Gongchang appears as the leader of a sub-branch belonging to a more extended sectarian organization. The over-all organization is said to consist of three main lineages (*san zong* 三宗), five lineages (*wu pai* 五派), nine stems, and eighteen branches (*jiu gan shiba zhi* 九杆十八枝). Under the rule of the *Huangji* Patriarch in the last age, Maitreya, there are forty-nine patriarchs who transmit the teaching on behalf of the buddha. The scripture continues describing the internal leadership structures of the communities (*hui* 會) of five patriarchs, the last of which is Gongchang.[95]

[94] *Longhua jing*, ch. 16, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 704b-705a.

[95] *Longhua jing*, ch. 16, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 704a/b.

The organization of nine stems and eighteen branches is a literary topos that describes an ideal and should not be taken literally.[96] Internally, membership in Gongchang's sect was organized in three levels called Higher, Middle, and Lower Vehicle, each of which had three degrees. Thus, there were altogether nine grades.[97] Although no further details are given, it is clear that the sect was part of a tradition with a more than rudimentary internal organization. The repeated reference to the Lotus School, a name already mentioned in the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* and the *Jiulian baojuan*, suggests that there was a clear consciousness of historical continuity even if this does not necessarily imply enduring social organizations. It appears, however, that Gongchang successfully integrated existing sectarian groups in his own organization when he travelled to the South to get into contact with other sectarians. There, he possibly took over the custom of giving *dharma* names to the initiated. The names of male members had *pu* 普 ("universal") as their first character, while for female members it was *miao* 妙 ("wonderful").[98] This, of course, calls to mind the affiliation characters that were common in the White Lotus and other lay Buddhist movements of the Song and Yuan dynasties.[99] Similar religious affiliation characters were used in the *Huangtian jiao* and the *Laoguan zhaijiao*.

By the time the *Longhua jing* was printed by disciples of Gongchang in 1652, the practice of adopting *dharma* names was well established. The religious names of the three men who arranged the printing had the affiliation character *pu*.[100] Two of them were also responsible for the publication of another *baojuan*, the *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan* 銷釋木人開山寶卷 (*Precious Scroll Explaining the Woodman's Work of Foundation*).[101] This text clearly belongs to the same sectarian group and repeats much of the information found in the *Longhua jing*. It describes the internal organization in even greater detail as having been established by the Unborn Mother.[102] And a third text, the *Xiaoshi jiexu Lianzong baojuan* 銷釋接續蓮宗寶卷 (*Precious Scroll Explaining the Continuation of*

[96] It is also mentioned in the *Jiulian jing*, ch. 22 (*BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 400) as the organization of the *Wuwei* teaching.

[97] *Longhua jing*, ch. 24, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 740a.

[98] *Longhua jing*, ch. 11, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 686a.

[99] Cf. above pp. 170, 181.

[100] *Longhua jing*, ch. 24, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 748a.

[101] Cf. *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan*, ch. 24, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 912a.

[102] *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan*, ch. 24, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 910b-912a.

the Lotus School), treats various subbranches of the same sectarian network. Since the scripture was reprinted twice during the Republican era,[103] we can be sure that sectarian groups tracing themselves back to the tradition of the *Longhua jing* still existed in the middle of the twentieth century.

During the Qing dynasty there were many sectarian groups that in one way or another were related to Gongchang's *Yuandun jiao.* The importance given to the *Longhua jing* by Huang Yupian shows that the book was widely used. But scriptures could be preserved even if sectarian organizations did not continue. There is no evidence that the sect founded by Gongchang persisted as a unified organization. Indeed, even in Gongchang's own times sectarian groups sharing the same heritage seem to have been independent of each other. We have no criteria that would allow to define precisely the identity and boundaries of a particular sect. In a diachronic perspective it is hardly possible to identify a given sectarian group with another that flourished one or two hundred years earlier. The names of sects were not fixed, beliefs and practices were open to change and scriptures could be obtained from various sources. New sectarian groups evolved continuously. They usually adopted names, beliefs, practices, and scriptures from the common tradition. Thus, there is little that could be regarded as a criterion defining a sect's identity. What can be observed in some cases, however, is the persistence of sectarian networks.

One such case is the network founded by Wang Sen, to which Gongchang's *Yuandun jiao* belonged. Although the *Dacheng jiao* had suffered from the persecution after the Xu Hongru rebellion in 1622, it was not completely destroyed. Some of its subbranches, as the *Yuandun jiao*, existed under various names, but the name *Dacheng jiao* was still widely in use in the early years of the Qing dynasty.[104] Some years later a branch of the *Dacheng jiao* was detected in Guangdong province.[105] There is no information from official sources about this and other sects during the Kangxi era (1662–1722), but thereafter the *Dacheng jiao* surfaced again. In 1732 several investigations were made in Shifokou, the home of Wang Sen, where one of his descendants still was the

[103] Cf. Che Xilun, *Zhongguo baojuan zongmu,* no. 946. The book is reprinted in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 481–637.

[104] Cf. *Donghua lu* 東華錄, *Shunzhi* 3 (1646), sixth month (page 7b), where the *Dacheng jiao* is mentioned along with *Bailian jiao*, *Hunyuan jiao* and *Wuwei jiao.*

[105] Cf. Ma/Han, pp. 591 f.

leader of a sect called *Dacheng jiao*. It was a vegetarian sect, whose practices included the recitation of scriptures and offerings of tea twice a month. Among its scriptures were two editions of the *Jiulian jing*, the "old" and the "continued" version. The sect was well organized with regular contributions of money by individual members that were transferred from the local communities to the sect head once or twice a year.[106] Thus, Wang Sen's descendants had established themselves as hereditary leaders of the *Dacheng jiao*, but we do not know to which degree this leadership was recognized by other sects of the same origin.

Note that the members of the sect performed rituals where scriptures were recited and tea offered. Since on the other hand the tradition to which the *Dacheng jiao* belonged stressed the importance of *neidan*-meditation, it obviously is not possible to distinguish clearly between "*sūtra*-reciting" and "meditational" sects, as has been proposed by Susan Naquin.[107] Even the *Longhua jing* shows the combination of meditational and ritual practices: While considering the cultivation in ten steps as the unique way to salvation, it also transmits liturgical formulas to praise and invite various deities to the ritual place.[108] The collective rituals included offerings of incense and probably also of tea.[109] Tea offerings seem to have been a distinctive feature of the *Dacheng jiao*, for already in the early years of the Qing dynasty it was also called *Qingcha hui* 清茶會 (Pure Tea Association).[110]

The case of 1732 was not the last one in which descendants of Wang Sen's were found as sect leaders. Members of the same family continued to propagate sectarian teachings even in other provinces as far as the region south of the Yangtze.[111] In 1815, two years after the

[106] Cf. Ma/Han, pp. 592–594.

[107] Cf. Susan Naquin, "The transmission of White Lotus sectarianism in late imperial China," in *Popular culture in late imperial China*, edited by David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn Rawski (Studies on China; 4), Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1985, pp. 255–291.

[108] Cf. *Longhua jing*, introductory section, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 641b-643b.

[109] Various offerings of tea are attested in the *Longhua baochan*, ch. 2 (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 757b) which is somewhat older than the *Longhua jing*.

[110] *Cun ren bian, j.* 2 (in *Si cun bian*, p. 155).

[111] In 1771, a descendant of Wang Haoxian's lineage was found propagating the teaching under the name *Baiyang jiao* 白陽教 south of the Yangtze. In 1792 and 1794 other members of the Wang family spread the teachings under the name *Qingcha men Hongyang jiao* 清茶門紅陽教 (Red Yang Teaching of the Pure Tea School) in Shanxi (Ma/Han, pp. 597 f). It seems that by then the sects led by the Wang family had already adopted the names of other sects and also their practices. For it is reported

great *Bagua* rebellion when the government was extremely sensitive to any sectarian activities, a large network was detected whose leaders belonged to the Wang family in Shifokou. Investigations were led by the governor of Zhili, Nayancheng 那彥成, who thoroughly pursued any traces of the sect. He, of course, found out that the Wang family descended from Wang Sen, who had been the leader of the *Wenxiang jiao* and whose descendants had transmitted the teaching under the name *Qingcha men* 清茶 門 (Pure Tea Sect) over ten generations and more than two hundred years. The sect members worshipped the Wang family and regularly paid money to it. Its leaders had a scripture entitled *Sanjiao yingjie zongguan tongshu* 三教應劫總觀通書 (*Comprehensive Writing of the Three Teachings about Responding to the Kalpa*), which had been used during Lin Qing's *Bagua* rebellion to incite the masses. In this book were talks about three teachings successively ruling the cosmos. When the time of Maitreya's rule has come, one year would have eighteen month. But above all there was the subversive saying:

> The Qing dynasty has come to its end and the *Sizhengwen* Buddha 四正文佛 has descended in the Wang family. When the barbarians have come to their end, who will ascend to the throne? When sun and moon appear again, he will belong to the Great Ming *Niuba* 牛八, who is originally Saturn.[112]

Although some symbols of this saying are enigmatic, its main message was completely clear. It foretells the end of the Qing dynasty and the restoration of the Ming under the leadership of the Zhu family.[113] Thus, the *Qingcha men* of the Wang family in Shifokou shared the anti-Manchu feelings that many popular sects had developed by the early nineteenth century. It seems to have been part of the sectarian milieu in north China that had formed the base of the network built by Lin Qing in preparation of his 1813 uprising. This sectarian milieu was, however, not altogether the same as two centuries before. For almost hundred years popular sects had been subjected to continuous

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that in the *Qingchamen Hongyang jiao* the sun was worshipped every day with offerings of one cup of water.

[112] *Na Wenyi gong zouyi* 那文毅公奏議 (Collected Memorials of Nayancheng), *j.* 42, 33a/b (reprinted Taibei 1968).

[113] The two characters of *Niuba* 牛八(literally meaning "ox eight") together form the character Zhu 朱, which was the surname of the Ming emperors. Likewise, the characters for *sun* and *moon* can be combined to one single character *ming* 明, which is also a reference to the Ming dynasty.

persecutions and extreme pressure. Under these conditions anti-Manchu propaganda fell on fertile ground and at least some sectarian leaders used these feelings for their own ambitions. The pressure of persecution disrupted many sectarian groups. Their leadership was executed and traditions were broken. When new sects reorganized they had to rebuild traditions from the available sources without paying much attention to sectarian denominations. At the same time, existing sects continued to interact, they recruited members from each other, sometimes formed networks, and in this way reinforced the tendencies of homogenization. The sects of the Wang family were no exception. They were also involved in the continuous turnover of beliefs and personnel. From its very beginning Wang Sen's *Dacheng jiao* had absorbed the teachings of various other sects. Thus, the scripture found by Nayancheng referring to a future world when a year will have eighteen months clearly is influenced by scriptures of the *Huangtian jiao* where the same motive occurs.[114] This influence may date back to Ming times since even the *Longhua jing* was affected by *Huangtian* scriptures, even if this particular element is not mentioned. But it is also possible that the *Qingcha men* had produced or obtained the *Sanjiao yingjie zongguan tongshu* at a later time.

To illustrate the complex mutual relationships among sectarian traditions, I quote from a report by Nayancheng. During his investigations he arrested a member of the *Longtianmen jiao* 龍天門教 (Teaching of the Dragon Heaven School) whose confession shows the difficulty of defining the boundaries between various sectarian traditions:

> The criminal Li Hexiu 李和修 confessed […] that the heterodox *Longtianmen jiao* originated with Patriarch Luo. When asked about the precedents of Patriarch Luo he answered that he did not know who transmitted the teaching before Patriarch Luo. He only knew that the [teaching of] Patriarch Luo was transmitted in eighteen branches and later thirteen [of these branches] broke off so that only five branches were continued. One branch is transmitted by members of the Wang 王 family in Shifokou situated West of Peking. According to what he had heard, members of this branch every year go to Shifokou [to visit their leader]. Another branch is headed by the Zhang 張 family. According to what he had heard this branch now has a Buddha hall in Peking, outside the southern city at the Dragon Lane Bridge in Cuihua Lane (*Cuihua hutong*), but he does not know its name. He has heard that boatmen from South China (Jiangnan 江南)

[114] See above p. 310.

> who practise this teaching send contributions of 'incense money' to Peking every year in the seventh or eighth month. Whether the Buddha hall is kept by [Buddhist] monks or Daoist priests he did not know. [His own sect, i.e.] the teaching of Lady Mi (Mi *nainai* 米奶奶) in Gaocheng county belongs to the branch of the Zhang family. [The leader of] another branch is called Yang Zongcai 楊宗彩. Another branch belongs to the Liu 劉 family. […] He does not know if there are still people who practise this teaching. Another branch belongs to the Chen 陳 family. He does not know where it is and if there still are people belonging to this sect. The above mentioned five branches are all followers of Patriarch Luo.[115]

It seems that Li Hexiu, who made this confession, was either not very well informed or did not want to give more details about the sect network to which he belonged. However, we recognize the tendency to identify various sects as belonging to the same tradition. The Zhang family that had a temple in Cuihua lane in Peking is without doubt connected with Cuihua Zhang Jie, who had introduced Gongchang to Wang Sen.[116] She was the leader of one of the branches mentioned in the *Longhua jing*.[117] Lady Mi, whose branch is here said to belong to the one on the Zhang family, is referred to in the *Longhua jing* as founder of the *Longtian jiao* 龍天教 (Dragon Heaven Teaching).[118] Thus, in the nineteenth century there were still sectarian groups identifying themselves with sect founders known more than two centuries earlier. Leadership in these sects seems to have passed within the families of their founders, and the Wang family in Shifokou, which is mentioned by Li Hexiu, was one of them. There were networks that extended far beyond individual sects. Already the *Longhua jing* and the *Muren baojuan*[119] included all major sects that flourished in northern China in late Ming in one common tradition. Even if they certainly did not belong to a unified organization, there was a strong consciousness of belonging together

[115] *ZPZZ*, Jiaqing 21/2/9 (1816), memorial by Nayancheng, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 691.

[116] See above p. 379.

[117] *Longhua jing*, j. 16, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 704b. In the *Xiaoshi jiexu Lianzong baojuan*, ch. 14 (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 541–544) a Cuihua Zhang Gong (Cuihua Lord Zhang) is treated, as successor to the Stone Buddha Patriarch Wang. This means that Cuihua is here considered a male person surnamed Zhang.

[118] *Longhua jing*, ch. 23, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 736b. The *Longtian jiao* was said to have been founded during the Longqing era (1567–1572) in Zhili by a woman surnamed Mi. Cf. Ma/Han, p. 691 quoting a confession of 1772.

[119] Cf. *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan*, introductory section (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 840a-841b) and ch. 20 (pp. 900b-901b).

that prevailed through the centuries. Most remarkably, Patriarch Luo and his tradition were not only included in this spectrum of sects, but given a privileged position as their original source. Whether this view was historically correct or not, we cannot say. But it is clear that the Luo tradition was an integral part of the popular sectarian milieu.

2. Proliferation of Popular Sects under the Qing

During the last decades of its rule the Ming dynasty was struck by economic crises, corruption, popular uprisings, and military pressure from the advancing Manchu forces in the Northwest. In April 1644, rebel forces led by Li Zicheng seized the capital Peking and the last Ming emperor committed suicide by hanging himself. The Manchu army, which had been invited by the Chinese general Wu Sangui 吳三桂 to suppress the rebels, took the opportunity to capture Peking and establish its own Qing dynasty as imperial rule in China. The Qing dynasty lasted for 267 years until in 1911 the last emperor resigned. The Manchu rulers, though of foreign origin, quickly adapted to Chinese government institutions and cultural traditions. They promoted classical learning and Confucianism and used them for the support of their political authority. After completely pacifying the country during the first decades of their rule, the Qing emperors succeeded in establishing firm control in a country that prospered both economically and culturally for about a century. But in the latter half of the eighteenth century the outward splendour of the dynasty became undermined by official corruption and fiscal imbalance. And the nineteenth century saw the gradual decline of political stability characterized by economic deterioration, popular uprisings, and the increasing pressure of the Western powers.

A major factor contributing to the social and economical problems the dynasty had to face was a tremendous growth in population. The ensuing shortage of arable land impoverished the lower classes and disrupted social stability. A ruthless autocratic rule further engendered feelings of discontent among the suppressed populace. Anti-Manchu sentiments and Ming loyalism became part of a social subculture where secret societies and popular sects combined. Beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century, popular sects were subjected to continuous persecution, which significantly shaped their further development. They

were forced into illegality and had to organize clandestinely. The gulf between heterodox teachings and orthodox forms of state approved religions widened, although most popular religious communities certainly had no political agenda. In some places local sects remained largely unaffected by persecutions and became part of the popular religious culture. However, the more extended sect networks were under the severe pressure of a government that attempted to eradicate them completely. Although persecution was brutal and execution of sect leaders the rule, the existence of popular sects proved to be an unsolvable problem to the government.

In the preceding chapters some examples have been given to show that the sects founded in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries all continued during the Qing dynasty. In many cases sect membership was transmitted within families and often proselytizing was rather limited. On the local level, some sectarian groups were part of the popular religions life. Their members acted as ritual specialists who performed rituals for the dead or even communal rites. These groups usually did not develop a notable dynamism of expansion. If new converts joined them, they often did so because they had been healed or because they hoped that the rituals were efficient to avert misfortune and obtain supernatural blessings. There was also the possibility to earn some money by performing rituals. Other members joined sects because they offered a way to practise religion in a community of like-minded people. Collective recitation of scriptures, moral edification, vegetarianism, and devotional worship were practices that attracted above all pious women, who represented a substantial proportion of sect members.

It is impossible to determine how widespread such small sectarian groups were, since in most cases they were not mentioned in official reports or other sources. There were certainly considerable local variations, but it seems that sect members represented only a tiny minority of the whole population. Their role in popular religious culture, however, may have been greater than their number. For those who were looking for religious forms of life, popular sects could be an attractive option. They were lay communities that did not demand abandoning family life and their teachings and practices were flexible enough to respond to the needs and circumstances. And in many places there were little alternatives. Buddhist lay communities of a more orthodox type depended on the presence and commitment of monks who were willing to act as spiritual advisers. In the villages of remote areas educated

monks were lacking and self-organized lay communities had little means to distinguish between orthodox and heterodox forms of piety. *Sūtra* chanting and vegetarianism were common in both orthodox and heterodox lay communities. Whether the scripture recited was part of the Buddhist canon or not was not always clear. Among the scriptures confiscated by officials in the houses of sect members, there was usually a mixture of orthodox Buddhist and Daoist writings and sectarian literature. It is doubtful that ordinary members were aware of these differences.

The dynamics of sectarian groups depended primarily on their leadership. Most local communities were probably conscious of belonging to larger traditions, but relations to other communities were not necessarily intense. Of course, official investigations often detected expanded networks of sectarian groups that sometimes stretched over many provinces. We have to take into account, however, that only a minority of local communities was ever reported on, and it was above all sectarian groups involved in activities beyond the local level that attracted the attention and suspicion of the authorities. To form networks and intensify mutual contacts demanded an active leadership. On the other hand, ambitious sect leaders were not only responsible for integrating various groups into larger structures, they also contributed to the splitting off of new branches. Thus, sectarian structures were not stable but changed continuously. It is therefore hardly possible to gain an overview over the innumerable sectarian groups and their mutual relationships. Although some sect names occur regularly, we cannot be sure that they always refer to the same organization. And sects that were historically closely connected often used different names.

To illustrate this intricate processes, I relate a case studied by Blaine Gaustad. In 1728, a sect leader was found in Shanxi who headed a *Longhua hui* (Dragon-Flower Assembly). In the following decades the disciples of this leader established their own sects that became known under the names *Wuwei jiao, Shouyuan*[#] *hui* 收緣會 (Attaining Affinity Assembly), *Ronghua hui* 榮華會 (Flourishing Flower Assembly) and *Shouyuan*[†] *jiao* 收元教 (Attaining the Origin Teaching).[120] Or, to give another example: In 1815 Wang Bingheng 王秉衡, a member of the Wang family in Shifokou, declared that his sect was known by the

[120] Cf. Blaine Gaustad, *Religious sectarianism and the state in mid-Qing China: Background of the White Lotus uprising of 1796–1804*, Berkeley: Ph.D. thesis, Department of History, University of California at Berkeley, 1994, pp. 12 f.

names *Hongyang jiao, Dacheng jiao, Wuwei jiao,* and *Qingjing jiao* 清淨教 (Clear and Pure Teaching). The same Wang Bingheng had earlier in 1805 converted a certain Liu Youxian 柳有賢 to his sect. Liu Youxian was the head of a group called *Wuwei jiao*.[121] The name of this *Wuwei jiao* was later changed into *Shouyuan jiao* 收圓教 (Attaining Competion Teaching).[122] Obviously, sect names are of little help for structuring the sectarian landscape. Unless we have additional information, sect names do not permit to identify certain traditions.

The proliferation of sects and sect names is just one aspect of sectarian development during the Qing. On the other hand there is evidence of extended sectarian networks. Sects belonging to such networks could surface under various names, and it was usually only in cases of thorough investigations that their mutual relationships were discovered. Officials usually paid much attention to such connections that could be traced through the names of sect members and their teachers. It is not always clear to which extent such personal connections reflect persisting structures of sectarian organizations. However, it is evident that many sect leaders and members were conscious of being related to more comprehensive traditions. Some of these traditions, as the network of the Wang family in Shifokou or the *Zhaijiao* in south China, existed since the late Ming. But many others emerged only during the Qing dynasty. In the following I shall deal with some of the more important new sect networks that extended over many provinces.

Zhang Baotai and his sectarian network in southwest China

In 1746 the Qing government was concerned with several sect cases. Near the capital, activities of the *Hongyang jiao* had been discovered that led to a severe persecution of the sect and the execution of its followers.[123] In the same year, another sect network was detected in the southwestern province of Sichuan. Its main leader Liu Qi 劉奇 was executed by slow-slicing, others were decapitated, and many sect members punished by beating and exile.[124] The Qianlong emperor

[121] *ZPZZ*, Jiaqing 20/10/14 (1815), memorial by Bai Ling 百齡, quoted in Ma/Han, pp. 599 f.

[122] Cf. Ma/Han, p. 644.

[123] See above pp. 333 ff.

[124] Cf. Ma/Han, pp. 1205 f. The following account of Zhang Baotai's sect relies on research done by Han Bingfang and Ma Xisha. They have mainly used archival material. For more details and sources see Ma/Han, pp. 1168–1229.

was greatly upset by these cases, which he considered a serious threat to political stability.

The case in Sichuan shows that sectarian activities were not confined to the northern and eastern provinces but covered the whole empire. The sect, whose leader in 1746 was Liu Qi, had connections to many provinces but its centres were in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan. According to the account of Zhu Xiangxian 朱象賢, who during the Qianlong era travelled in the region, the sect originated in Taihe county 太和縣 in Yunnan during the Kangxi era. Its founder was Zhang Baotai 張保太 (1659–1741), and the teaching was called *Dacheng jiao* (Great Vehicle Teaching).[125] The name *Dacheng jiao* is the same as used by Wang Sen in north China but there is no evidence of any dependency of the Yunnan *Dacheng jiao* upon its northern namesake. Zhang Baotai was a *gongsheng* ("tribute student"). He was said to continue the teaching of Yang Pengyi 楊鵬翼 who had been a *shengyuan* 生員 ("government student"). Thus, Zhang Baotai had some education, and his cultural background seems to have been different from most other sect founders. In 1681 he started to propagate his teaching by establishing a small temple in the region of the Jizushan 雞足山 (Cock's Foot Mountain), which was an important centre of Buddhist pilgrimage in Yunnan.[126] There was a constant flow of pilgrims from distant places and Zhang Baotai used the opportunity to propagate his teachings among them. In this way he established a network of followers mainly from Yunnan and the neighbouring provinces Guizhou and Sichuan. Zhang Baotai's activities remained unnoticed by the authorities for half a century, until in 1730 he was arrested and sentenced to death. He stayed in prison for some years, but in 1735 was granted amnesty on the occasion of the Qianlong emperor's enthronement.[127]

Four years later it became apparent that his sect had spread down the Yangtze to Jiangsu province. In 1739, a certain Xia Tianyou 夏天

[125] Zhu Xiangxian 朱象賢, *Wenjian oulu, Sanjiao heyi* 聞見偶錄， 三教合一, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 1180.

[126] According to legend Śākyamuni's disciple Mahākāśyapa after attaining *nirvāṇa* hides in the Cock's Foot Mountain (*Kakkuṭapada*) until Maitreya descends from Tuṣita heaven. He will then transmit the Buddha's robe to Maitreya. In China this mountain was identified with the Jizushan in Yunnan which became a sacred place. Many monasteries were built there. Cf. Max Deeg, "Das Ende des Dharma und die Ankunft des Maitreya. Endzeit und Neue-Zeit Vorstellungen im Buddhismus mit einem Exkurs zur Kāsyapa-Legende," *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft*, 7 (1999), pp. 145–169.

[127] *ZPZZ*, Qianlong 4/11/22 (1739), memorial by Qing Fu 慶復, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 1187.

佑 was arrested, who was the leader of a sectarian group called *Xilai jiao* 西來教 (Teaching that Comes from the West). It turned out that Xia Tianyou had formerly been in Yunnan to visit Zhang Baotai who had given him scriptures and a registration certificate.[128] It was a common practice in Zhang Baotai's sect to register members and to give them certificates that allowed to be recognized by sect leaders in other places. The arrest of Xia Tianyou entailed further investigations in Yunnan. Zhang Baotai was imprisoned again and died in 1741.[129] As it often occurred after the death of a sect founder, the organization split into several branches under different leaders. Zhang Baotai's adopted son Zhang Xiao 張曉 succeeded his father as head of the sect in Yunnan, but in other provinces leadership was taken over by other disciples.

Head of the branch in Guizhou was a woman, Wei Wangshi 魏王氏 (Wei née Wang), who had inherited leadership from her husband. Both were direct disciples of Zhang Baotai.[130] The branch in Sichuan came under control of Liu Qi. Liu Qi was only a second generation disciple of the sect founder. He claimed, however, to be a reincarnation of Zhang Baotai. Under his leadership the sect's teachings became strongly politicized combining millenarian expectations with anti-Manchu propaganda. He reorganized his sect into three branches called *Fachuan jiao* 法船教 (Dharma Boat Teaching), *Tiechuan jiao* 鐵船教 (Iron Boat Teaching) and *Wenchuan jiao* 瘟船教 (Plague Boat Teaching). These three sects acted independently of each other to make investigations into their networks more difficult. They had to fear government action since they had a political agenda. The head of the *Tiechuan jiao* was called Zhu Hongsheng 朱洪生, alias Zhu Niuba 朱牛八. Both variants of this name were symbolically loaded. Zhu was the family name of the Ming emperors and *Niuba* is a cryptogram of two characters that when written as one form the name Zhu. These and similar names were common in what may be called "political messianism" during the Qing dynasty. They refer to a mixture of political and religious aspirations including the expectation of Maitreya's descent

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[128] 乾隆, Qianlong 4/11/22 (1739), memorial by Qing Fu, quoted in Ma/Han, pp. 1188 f.

[129] Cf. Ma/Han, p. 1191.

[130] For Wei Wangshi and the role of other female leaders of this sect cf. Erhard Rosner, "Frauen als Anführerinnen chinesischer Sekten," in *Religion und Philosophie in Ostasien. Festschrift für Hans Steininger zum 65. Geburtstag*, edited by Gert Naundorf and Hans Pohl, Würzburg: Köngshausen & Neumann, 1985, pp. 239–246.

and the restoration of the Ming dynasty.[131] It seems that Zhang Baotai and Liu Qi declared themselves manifestations of Maitreya,[132] and it is evident that the restoration of the Ming was part of Liu Qi's propaganda. He secretly spread rumours about another popular saviour figure, Li Kaihua[133] 李開花 ("Plum Opening Blossom"), and declared that he had appeared in the person of a certain Su Junxian 蘇君賢 who would be the emperor restoring the Ming dynasty. This was clearly a political message, and the Qianlong emperor accordingly ordered intense investigations and measures to exterminate these subversive sects. Since Liu Qi had been cautious to operate clandestinely, it was difficult to uncover his organization. But finally the connections with Zhang Baotai's sect were disclosed: "The heretical *Sanchuan jiao* 三船教 (Three Boats Teachings), although they use different names, are basically the same, since they all derive from Zhang Baotai's heretical *Dacheng jiao*."[134]

The success of the official investigations proves the painstaking scrutiny of government actions. The emperor put high pressure on provincial officials to trace sect connections across the boundaries of provinces and was not appeased before all sect leaders were caught. In the present case, Liu Qi, whose stronghold was in Sichuan, was detected following investigations in Guizhou. The Guizhou branch of Zhang Baotai's sect under the leadership of Wei Wangshi had come to the attention of local officials. Although Wei Wangshi was not suspected of political activities and actually was not involved in Liu Qi's schemes, the governor-general ordered her sect to be scrutinized. It was infiltrated by a spy who gained Wei Wangshi's confidence and gathered information about related sects in other provinces. In this way the sect network built by Zhang Baotai, of which the authorities had been unaware although they had captured him twice, was unveiled. What followed was a concerted police action in the three provinces of Guizhou, Sichuan, and Yunnan. Wei Wangshi, Liu Qi, and Zhang Xiao were caught and with many other leading sect members executed. Even Zhang Baotai

[131] We have met the same cryptogram *Niuba* above in a prophetic saying used during the *Bagua* uprising in 1813 (cf. above p. 399). For the role of the names Zhu Niuba and Zhu Hongsheng in political messianism during the Qing see ter Haar, *Ritual and mythology of the Chinese Triads*, pp. 233 f, 257.

[132] Cf. Ma/Han, p. 1182, no source given.

[133] For Li Kaihua as the name of saviour see ter Haar, *Ritual and mythology of the Chinese Triads*, pp. 254 f.

[134] *ZPZZ*, Qianlong 11/8/12 (1746), memorial by Qing Fu, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 1202.

was not spared. His remains were exhumed, dismembered, and burned to ashes.[135]

The emperor was aware that executing sect leaders and deporting members to border regions was not enough to annihilate the dangers posed by teachings such as Liu Qi's. Destroying sect organizations was one thing, but there was still the risk that similar teachings may surface again. Zhang Baotai and Liu Qi had written and distributed many scriptures containing heterodox teachings about the turn of *kalpas* and the coming of a new time.[136] Such scriptures could easily be used again to propagate the same teachings. And there were also books and prophetic writings from other sources that promoted similar beliefs. Aspirations for a restoration of the Ming were not confined to Liu Qi's sect but had appeared in other cases as well. Great weight was therefore given to destroying subversive literature. In 1746, an edict was promulgated demanding the destruction of all heterodox and prophetic books. Everyone was given a limited period to avoid punishment by declaring himself and delivering such scriptures to the local officials, who had to burn them immediately.[137] How serious the authorities took the task of searching and destroying sectarian writings is revealed by the fact that they even dug the ground in Liu Qi's house. They actually found scriptures hidden in the ground of his bedroom.[138] The meticulous search for sectarian literature after the 1746 edict seems to have been unusually successful in this case. None of Zhang Baotai's and Liu Qi's writings have survived.

Zhang Baotai's *Dacheng jiao* shows that popular religious sectarianism was not confined to north China and the coastal provinces. Although we cannot exclude some influence of the northern sects, it is clear that the sectarian milieu in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan was different from the one in Zhili. Zhang Baotai and Liu Qi had their own scriptures and not a single title of the northern *baojuan* was found during the

[135] *ZPZZ*, Qianlong 12/1/6 (1747), memorial by Zhang Yunsui 張允隨, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 1194 f.

[136] For the titles of scriptures written by Zhang Baotai and Liu Qi see Ma/Han, p. 1179. None of these scriptures has survived. Judging from the titles, eschatological teachings about the end of the *kalpa* were part of the beliefs although not very prominent. However, Liu Qi's political propaganda probably was selective in using Zhang Baotai's teachings and stressed the messianic and eschatological elements.

[137] *Qing shilu, Gaozong shilu, j.* 271, vol. 12, p. 542b (Qianlong 11/7 [1746]).

[138] *ZPZZ*, Qianlong 11/8/21 (1746), memorial by Qing Fu and Ji Shan 紀山, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 1207.

investigations. Since their writings are all lost, not many details of their teachings are known. Judging from the titles, stress was laid on the unity of the three teachings, and there were also teachings about the end of the present *kalpa*. Sect members kept a vegetarian diet and formed local congregations. They had public rituals four times a year to worship the Four Officials (*si guan* 四官). The cult Four Officials was probably derived from the Daoist cult of the Three Officials, namely, Heaven, Earth, and Water, to which Fire was added as the fourth official. Whether this was an innovation made by Zhang Baotai or based on local popular traditions cannot be said. In any case the cult of the Four Officials shows that Zhang Baotai's sect belonged to a sectarian milieu that was different from the North.[139]

It also seems that the combination of sectarian teachings with Ming loyalism and anti-Manchu propaganda, which is apparent in Liu Qi's case, had its roots in popular milieus in Yunnan. These regions had been strongholds of Chinese resistance against the Manchu invasion. General Wu Sangui, who had first helped the Qing to oust the Ming, had been rewarded and given jurisdiction over Yunnan where he established a rule that was virtually independent of Qing supervision. In 1673 he rebelled proclaiming a new dynasty and announced his intention of overthrowing the Qing and reviving the Ming. It took the Qing forces several years of hard fighting before in 1681 the rebellion was put down.[140] In the same year 1681 Zhang Baotai established his preaching hall and started to propagate his teachings. Like his teacher Yang Pengyi he belonged to the Confucian elite in Wu Sangui's kingdom. Born in 1659 he had grown up in a time of strong anti-Manchu propaganda and we can easily imagine that this sentiment did not vanish when the Qing armies occupied Yunnan. Since under his successor Liu Qi anti-Manchu propaganda became evident, we may suppose that it was part of Zhang Baotai's teachings, although there is no direct evidence. In any case, by the 1740s, sects regarding Zhang Baotai as their patriarch had clear political overtones that are not found in the late Ming sects. During the following decades, anti-Manchu feelings and hopes for the restoration of the Ming became part of

[139] For a reconstruction of the main elements of Zhang Baotai's teaching see Ma/Han, pp. 1179–1186.

[140] Cf. Immanuel C.H. Hsü, *The rise of modern China*., 2. ed., New York/London/Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 38 f.

certain popular milieus where secret societies and religious sects approached each other.[141]

While the sectarian tradition in southwest China as represented by Zhang Baotai's *Dacheng jiao* had its peculiarities, it should not be overlooked that it shared many elements with the northern and eastern traditions. Beliefs in the end of the *kalpa* and the advent of Maitreya belonged to the popular religious milieu everywhere and were not confined to particular sectarian traditions. Likewise, vegetarianism was common in many forms of lay piety and therefore easily found its place in popular sects. And, of course, the unity of the Three Teachings or a symbol such as *Wuji* (Limitless) were not confined to sectarian beliefs but permeated the symbolic space of Chinese religious culture. Unfortunately, we do not know exactly how these beliefs and symbols were combined in Zhang Baotai's case. As can be seen from the cult of the Four Officials, his teachings were not just a local variant of the northern sects. The whole *baojuan* literature of the North seems to have been unknown to him. However, even though the sectarian milieus were different they relied on a stock of symbols that to a considerable degree was not confined to local and regional traditions. These symbols may have been interpreted differently in different milieus, but they provided a common base on which communication was possible. Thus, when Zhang Baotai's teachings were spread to the lower Yangtze region they could easily merge with sectarian traditions there.

To conclude the description of sects related to Zhang Baotai, I shall shortly mention one further case. It happened in Changzhou 常州 prefecture in southern Jiangsu. The case is remarkable not for its historical significance but because it sheds some light on extreme interpretations of sectarian teachings. In 1744 a sectarian group called *Longhuahui jiao* (Dragon-Flower Assembly Teaching) was uncovered in Changzhou prefecture, which is bordering Zhejiang province. The leader of this sect was a monk by the name Shiji 時濟 who venerated Zhang Baotai as patriarch of his teaching. In the second month of that year fifteen members of his sect, men, women, and children, went by boat to an island in lake Taihu. There they visited a temple and

[141] For interaction between the politically oriented secret society of the Triad (*Tiandi hui* 天地會, Heaven and Earth Society) and sectarian traditions, particularly that of Patriarch Luo, see ter Haar, *Ritual and mythology of the Chinese Triads*, pp. 390–400. The relations between the Luo tradition and the *Qing bang* 青幫 (Green Gang) is described in detail in Ma/Han, pp. 242–329.

practised meditation (*zuo gong* 坐功) for thirteen days without eating anything. On the thirteenth day all but two died. The surviving two returned home to report what had happened.[142]

The investigations brought to light that Shiji taught a method of cultivation to enlighten the mind and realize one's nature by harmonizing *shen* and *qi* (spirit and pneuma) within the body. After practising meditation for seven or fourteen days it would be possible to see one's original *qi*. As far as can be judged from the investigation reports, Shiji propagated some kind of *neidan* meditation as a means to salvation. That was nothing unusual. Nor was it unusual that the aim of such practices was described as attaining buddhahood. In many sectarian scriptures it was common to call sect members "bodhisattvas" or "buddhas". "Becoming a buddha" usually meant attaining enlightenment through realizing that one's true nature is not different from the nature of a buddha. In the *Longhua jing* it was taught that the cultivation in ten steps would allow to return to one's original nature and to attend the Dragon-Flower Assembly in this very body. And after death one would join the Dragon-Flower Assembly in heaven. However, as has been observed before, such teachings could be understood in various way. Depending on the intellectual background of readers or hearers the symbols and mythological images could be understood rather literally. Thus, the symbol "buddha" in popular religious milieus was open to interpretation. For those who worshipped buddhas in temples a "buddha" was not primarily one who had attained enlightenment, but a supernatural being. "Becoming a buddha" would then mean transcending the human sphere and achieving a god-like form of existence.

Some of his followers, if not Shiji himself, seem to have understood the teachings in this literal sense. For them returning to heaven was not a metaphor for realizing one's own nature and uniting with the origin. One sect member proclaimed that they would return to heaven in that year. Therefore they started meditating and stopped eating and finally died of starvation. There is no evidence that this collective suicide was connected with eschatological or apocalyptic expectations. It rather seems that a small sectarian group had developed its own extreme understanding of teachings that were known also in other contexts. If the final aim of the practice was described as ascending to

[142] *JJCLFZZ*, Qianlong 9/3/13 (1744), memorial by Chen Dashou 陳大受, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 1209. For more details about this case see Ma/Han, p. 1109–1212. Cf. also de Groot, *Sectarianism*, pp. 160 f.

heaven to join the Dragon-Flower Assembly, the wish to speed the way to this last fulfilment was not completely unreasonable. However, no other case of ritual suicide out of religious motives is known from Ming and Qing sources.

Although the monk Shiji regarded Zhang Baotai as patriarch of his sect, it does not appear that this incident was prompted by teachings prevailing in Zhang's *Dacheng jiao*. Shiji used several scriptures, among them a *Longhua jiao zhipai zu yu* 龍華教支派祖諭 (Instructions by the Patriarchs of the Branches and Lines of the Dragon-Flower Teaching).[143] The name *Longhua jiao* was an alternative designation for the *Laoguan zhaijiao* in south China, which is commonly taken as the southern version of the "Luo sects". Since Shiji's *Longhua jiao* was active in southern Jiangsu, it is probable that he was in some way connected with that tradition. Thus, his sect is an example of the evolving interaction of sectarian traditions originating in different corners of the empire and the emergence of an increasingly homogenized sectarian milieu.

The Shouyuan† jiao and Bagua jiao (Eight Trigrams Teaching) networks

In early 1748, less than two years after the execution of Liu Qi and other leaders of Zhang Baotai's network, the authorities raided a sect in several counties of Shanxi province arresting several leaders and confiscating a number of sectarian writings. The sect was called *Shouyuan† jiao* 收元教 (Attaining the Origin Teaching) and headed by a certain Han Derong 韓德榮. The governor of Shanxi who supervised the investigations found that the scriptures used by the sect contained many heterodox elements. Moreover, the sect name *Shouyuan† jiao* was similar to the expression *shouyuan* 收圓 (attaining completion), which was known from Zhang Baotai's *Dacheng jiao.* The case was therefore considered a serious one and further investigations followed. Han Derong's *Shouyuan† jiao* was traced back to his teacher Liu Ruhan 劉儒漢 of Shan county 單縣 in Shandong province. More than forty years earlier, in 1705, Han Derong had become Liu Ruhan's disciple and received from him five manuscripts, among them a *Bagua tu* 八卦圖 (*Chart of the Eight Trigrams*) and a *Wu nü chuandao shu* 五女傳道書 (*Writing about the Five Women's Transmission of the* Dao).[144]

[143] Ma/Han, p. 1179.

[144] Cf. Zhuang Jifa 莊吉法, "Qingdai Qianlong nianjian de Shouyuan jiao ji qi

The sect network to which Han Derong's *Shouyuan† jiao* belonged was one of the most extended in northern China. Its sects appeared under various names, but during the latter half of the eighteenth century the name *Bagua jiao* 八挂教 was used as a common designation.[145] Although the sects of the *Bagua* tradition did not form a unified organization, they all derived from the same source. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries they were repeatedly persecuted, and during the ensuing investigations the major lines of transmission were reconstructed. Since sects connected with the *Bagua* tradition were involved in a major uprising in 1813, they gained a certain fame. Based mainly on Ma Xisha's research,[146] I shall therefore summarize the development of the *Bagua jiao* as an example of sectarian networks during the Qing.

Bagua networks in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

Like many other sects, the *Bagua jiao* is closely connected with certain families that through generations held leadership positions in different branches of this network. In the centre was the Liu 劉 family of Shan county in Shandong. In 1748 Han Derong had named a certain Liu Ruhan as his teacher. It was found out that Liu Ruhan was a county magistrate by purchase in Shanxi, who in 1719 was dismissed because his father Liu Zuochen 劉佐臣 had been a leader of the *Bailian jiao* (White Lotus Teaching). Liu Zuochen's sect was actually called *Shouyuan† jiao* 收元教 (Attaining the Origin Teaching). The term *shouyuan* (written with various characters) had a long history in sectarian milieus[147] and Liu Zuochen without doubt was influenced by older sectarian traditions. We have, however, no contemporary evidence of Liu Zuochen's activities. He probably died around the year 1700. Most information stems from confessions made by members of *Bagua* sects many decades after

zhipai 清代乾隆年間的收元教及其支派," *Dalu zazhi* 大陸雜誌 63, no. 4 (1981), pp. 188–198: 188 f.

[145] According to Ma Xisha the name *Bagua jiao* is first mentioned in Qing documents in 1786 (*Qingdai Bagua jiao*, p. 55).

[146] See Ma Xisha, *Qingdai Bagua jiao* and Ma/Han, pp. 929–1091. I usually only refer to these publications which are amply documented.

[147] The *Longhua jing* (ch. 24, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 737b) mentions a *Shouyuan* jiao* 收源教. The term *shouyuan* appears already as an alternative title of the *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, which was commonly known as *Shouyuan baojuan* (cf. above p. 274). The scripture also mentions the sect name *Shouyuan dadao* (ch. 4, in *BJCJ*, vol. 10, p. 277). A *Shouyuan* dao* appears also in the old version of the *Jiulian baojuan* (ch. 16, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 306 f).

his death. According to these accounts it was Liu Zuochen who first transmitted the five scriptures found in 1748.[148] It seems that already Liu Zuochen laid the foundation to the division of his sect into different branches. It was, however, only his son Liu Ruhan who formally established eight branches each named after one of the eight trigrams and headed by an appointed leader.[149] This form of organization was an ideal one, for it is mentioned in sectarian literature already two centuries before.[150] The eight branches apparently existed more in theory than in practice since some branch leaders were responsible for two trigrams at the same time. Nevertheless, Liu Ruhan's leadership was very effective. According to the usual system, money was collected from members of the different branches and transferred to the sect head. In this way, Liu Ruhan was able to amass enormous wealth which allowed him to purchase the office of a county magistrate that alone cost him more than 4.600 taels of silver. His younger brother likewise bought an official title.[151] Although they were both dismissed from office because of their father's involvement in sect activities, the Liu family had thus succeeded in securing a position of local influence and respect. Liu Ruhan died in 1736 without having been identified by the authorities as a sect leader.

During his lifetime the network of his sects spread over the provinces of Shandong, Shanxi, Henan, and Zhili. In Shanxi, leadership was taken over by his disciple Han Derong in 1738 who, as we have seen, was arrested ten years later. On this occasion the authorities also questioned Liu Ruhan's son Liu Ke 劉恪 who held the office of department vice magistrate (*zhoutong* 州同) by purchase.[152] They became convinced that he had nothing to do with heterodox teachings. Only two decades later, in 1772, it was found out that in fact Liu Ke had succeeded his father in leadership of the sect and had regularly received large sums of money from the various branches of its network.[153] Given the carefulness that officials usually applied to the investigation of sects, it is

[148] Of these five scriptures only the *Wu nü chuandao shu* still exists (Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, pp. 68 f).

[149] Cf. Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, p. 83.

[150] Cf. *Jiulian baojuan*, ch. 22 (*BJCJ*, vol. 8, pp. 400 f), ch. 24 (p. 469). The same form of organization is also mentioned in the *Longhua jing*, ch. 10 (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 677b-678a, 681b).

[151] Cf. Ma/Han, p. 950.

[152] Cf. Ma/Han, p. 934.

[153] Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, pp. 86 f.

astonishing that despite several inquiries the role of Liu Ruhan and Liu Ke as sect leaders escaped their notice. Although they were recognized by members of their sects as central leaders and received money, they kept a distance to common sectarian activities. Their role was that of "hidden masters" in the background rather than of active leaders of sectarian communities. They both had purchased offices and in this way attempted to find a respected position among the elites. And they both lost office because their family's affinity to sect activities was detected. That they were not further punished may have been due to their official positions, but they evidently were able to conceal their actual role as sect masters.

The importance of the Liu family as the central authority of a vast sectarian network was disclosed only in 1772. In that year a sect leader named Wang Zhong 王中 was arrested in Shandong. In his possession was a *Xunshu* 訓書 (Book of Instruction) that the emperor personally inspected, and which he found to contain concealed references to the overthrowing of "barbarians," that is, the Manchu dynasty. Wang Zhong refused to reveal any secrets about his sect and was executed. However, another sect member confessed that he had heard that the central leader of the sect was surnamed Liu and lived in Shan county. This leader was said to be *jiansheng*[154] 監生 whose ancestors had all been officials. Since this family was very distinguished, no one had access to the central leader except Wang Zhong. In the following investigations Liu Shengguo 劉省過, a son of Liu Ke's, was arrested in Shan county. In his house a huge treasure of more than twelve thousand taels of silver was found. The officials uncovered an extended network of sects that actually was divided into branches named after the eight trigrams. Only the *kun* 坤 branch had not yet been established. Liu Shengguo and many other sect leaders were executed or banished to the frontiers.[155]

Thus, finally the sectarian kingdom of the Liu family was detected and destroyed by the Qing government. For four generations members

[154] "Student by Purchase Fourth Class" (Charles O. Hucker, *A dictionary of official titles in Imperial China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985., no. 856). Hucker explains as "Students by Purchase in the National University consisting of men who were admitted without having passed at any level of the civil examination recruitment system, in recognition of their contributions of grain or money to the state." Actually, Liu Shengguo was not a *jiansheng* but had purchased the office of assistant to a county magistrate.

[155] Cf. Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, pp. 87–89.

of this sect had built a secret organization whose central leadership remained unnoticed by the authorities although some offshoots were repeatedly investigated. The organization founded by Luo Zuochen was designed to give maximum protection to the head master by reducing contact with members to the leaders of branch sects. The model of this design was based on the symbols of the eight trigrams and nine palaces (*bagua jiugong* 八挂九宫), which from the early sixteenth century on is mentioned in sectarian scriptures as an ideal system of organization. The eight branches had their own leaders with the head master keeping the central position corresponding to the ninth palace. One wonders how the Lius succeeded in keeping the loyalty of the branch leaders, which obviously was the case since they received large sums of money. This can only be understood if we consider the religious aspects of the *Bagua jiao.*

Of the scriptures transmitted by Liu Zuochen only the *Wu nü chuandao shu* (*Writing about the Five Women's Transmission of the* Dao) has survived. According to Ma Xisha's analysis the text contains a metaphorical story of an old and pious couple who in a temple meets five spinning women. The women, who are in fact five bodhisattvas, reveal the secrets of internal alchemy (*neidan*) taking spinning as a metaphor for the practice of cultivation: The *dao* is not to be sought far away but is right at hand within one's own body and mind. It can be found through untiring cultivation. This method of cultivation must be taught by a saint teacher who thus reveals the way to salvation.[156] The *Wu nü chuandao shu* was the core scripture of the *Bagua jiao,* and the transmission of certain techniques of meditation was the central element of its teaching. The exoteric aim of these practices was to "attain blessing and avoid misfortune," as the members usually confessed, while their esoteric meaning was to transcend human limitations and to reach salvation.[157]

In this context Liu Zuochen had the position of the saint teacher who was worshipped by his followers as a supernatural manifestation, as incarnation of Maitreya and the sun that illuminates the whole world. It was this religious significance of the sect leaders that secured their prestige. And it seems that this prestige was even enhanced by their remoteness from ordinary believers. The members of the Liu

[156] Cf. Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao,* pp. 69 f.

[157] For details about the religious practices and aims of "meditational sects" as typified by the *Bagua jiao* see Susan Naquin, "The transmission of White Lotus sectarianism," pp. 274–288.

family represented the source of legitimacy. Other sect leaders who had the privilege of access to this family derived their own prestige from it.[158] Even after the execution of Liu Shengguo in 1772 the religious aura of his family was strong enough for other sect leaders to base their own legitimation on the authority of the Liu family. A member of the family, Liu Tingxian 劉廷獻, had been banished to Xinjiang after the 1772 incident where he served as a peasant. In 1780, a leader of the *Zhengua* 震挂 (*Zhen* Trigram) branch sent messengers to Xinjiang to get into contact with Liu Tingxian and asked him to accept the central leadership. In the following decades several missions were sent to Xinjiang to present money to Liu Tingxian and his sons who succeeded him after his death. Until 1817 about eight thousand taels of silver had thus been transferred over thousands of miles to keep the contact with sect heads who did not have more than a ritual function.[159] It would have been convenient for the leaders in north China to keep the money for themselves. That they did not do so reveals the enormous prestige that the Liu family had and the need of other leaders to establish their own authority through contact with the remote sect heads.

The regular contributions of money do not leave any doubt that at least the leaders of some sub-sects of the *Bagua jiao* recognized the religious authority of the Liu family until 1772. Since in that year seven branches organized after the *Bagua* system were uncovered, it is evident that the network existed not only in theory. However, only three of the branch sects were historically significant in the sense that their names appear with some regularity in official documents. This may, of course, be due to the fact that the others were not detected. More probable, however, is that the division into eight trigrams was an ideal model of sect organization and leadership that most of the time did not reflect the actual situation. In any case, most sectarian groups related to this network were normally known by other names. Thus, the sect led by Wang Zhong, whose arrest in 1772 led to the detection of Liu Shengguo and his *Bagua* network, was called *Qingshui jiao* 清水教 (Pure Water Teaching). At the same time, however, Wang

[158] A similar constellation is described by Gaustad (*Religious sectarianism and the state in mid-Qing China*, p. 27) in the case of the *Hunyuan jiao* 混元教 where in the last decades of the eighteenth century Wang Huaiyu 王懷玉 was a hidden sectarian leader who, "remote and somewhat mysterious, provided a kind of institutional charisma."

[159] Cf. Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, pp. 100–104.

Zhong was considered head of the *Zhengua* branch. The *Zhengua* branch had reportedly already been established by Liu Zuochen, but there were conflicting traditions about which family had been entrusted with its leadership.[160] This shows that the *Zhengua jiao* was no unified organization but internally divided into at least two lineages led by different families. The branch of the Wang family was called *Qingshui jiao.* After Wang Zhong's execution the sect was repeatedly discovered by the authorities, and the Wang family is still mentioned in 1824. By that time, however, the *Zhengua jiao* had dissolved into many smaller groups without an overall leadership.[161] Yet, the fame of the family was lasting and used by other leaders to legitimize their own position. Thus, Li Wencheng 李文成, one of the leaders of the 1813 *Bagua* rebellion,[162] claimed to be a reincarnation of the *Zhengua* leader Wang,[163] probably referring to Wang Zhong. The *Zhengua jiao* of the Wang family had thus found its way into the lore of sectarian milieus.

The second main branch of the *Bagua jiao* network was the *Ligua jiao* 離挂教 (*Li* Trigram Teaching). It was involved more directly in the 1813 uprising. In the years before, when a large network of various sects was formed under the leadership of Lin Qing, a number of these sects was connected to the *Ligua jiao* of the Gao 郜 family in Henan. Belonging to a sect was mainly defined through teacher-disciple relationships and so it was in this case, too. Contacts between different groups was not very intense and it depended mainly on individual leaders to which degree his sect gained new converts and expanded. In 1811 one of these groups, which had adopted the name *Dacheng jiao*, came to the attention of the government, but the resulting persecutions were not particularly severe. There were more persecutions in the following years and some sect leaders reacted by planning a rebellion. Before these plans were realized, the great uprising of 1813 under the

[160] Cf. Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao,* pp. 104–106. The traditions relating the early history of the *Zhengua jiao* are relatively late and obviously attempt to legitimate the leadership of two different sect lineages.

[161] Wang Zhong's son who had escaped the persecution of 1772 was arrested in 1788 and exiled to Xinjiang where he was executed three years later. The last members of the Wang family who were involved in sect activities were executed in 1824. For details see Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao,* pp. 106–113.

[162] See above pp. 339 ff.

[163] Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China,* p. 92.

leadership of Lin Qing broke out.[164] The *Dacheng jiao* and other branches of the *Ligua jiao* then participated in this rebellion.

During the painstaking examinations following this extraordinary case, which had culminated in the direct attack on the Forbidden City in Peking, a member of the Gao family in Henan was captured. In the confessions of Gao Tianyou 郜添佑 the history of his sect is traced back to his ancestor Gao Yunlong 郜雲龍. He had established the *Ligua jiao* as a disciple of Sir Liu from Shan county in Shandong who was an incarnation of Maitreya. After Gao Yunlong's death the leadership of the sect was inherited by his descendants.[165] "Sir Liu" here certainly refers to Liu Zuochen, the founder of the *Shouyuan*† *jiao*, which later became known as *Bagua jiao*. Thus, from its very beginning the *Ligua jiao* was connected to the Liu family, and these connections are well documented in the eighteenth century. Gao Yunlong's grandson still considered Liu Ke, who was Liu Zuochen's grandson, as sect leader and regularly sent money to him. Three of his sons were arrested and executed in 1772 when Liu Shengguo was detected as leader of the *Bagua jiao*. Gao Tianyou, who was captured in 1813, was the son of one of their brothers who had escaped the persecution.[166] The Gao family thus had transmitted leadership of the *Ligua jiao* for more than a century, and at least until 1772 maintained close relationship with the sect head of the Liu family. Like many members of the latter, Gao Tianyou held an official rank by purchase, which shows that the leaders of the *Ligua jiao* had become wealthy and well established. It does not seem that Gao Tianyou was actively involved in the rebellion of 1813, and in any case most of the sects that had branched off from the *Ligua jiao* acted independently and were not subordinated to the Gao family in any political sense.[167] Instead they were integrated in the new networks built by Lin Qing in preparation of the rebellion.

This rebellion is intimately connected with the name *Bagua*. Lin Qing used this ideal model of sect organization to structure his complex network of sects that came from most diverse traditions. Susan Naquin has in detail reconstructed the formation of this network in which Lin Qing himself assumed the role of leader of the *Kangua jiao* 坎挂教 (*Kan*

[164] Cf. Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China*, pp. 55–60.

[165] Cf. Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, p. 114.

[166] Cf. Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, pp. 114–116; Zhuang Jifa, "Qingdai Qianlong nianjian de Shouyuan jiao ji qi zhipai," p. 189b.

[167] Cf. Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China*, p. 130.

Trigram Teaching).[168] No doubt, however, that this *Kangua jiao* was newly established by Lin Qing, as were the *Zhengua* and the *Ligua* branches of his network.[169] Lin Qing and his companions were not sect masters of the traditional type who had inherited leadership of existing networks. They rather attempted with some success to bring together various smaller sectarian groups and to built an overall network designed after the model of the eight trigrams. This new organization, however, was not the same as the *Bagua* network that in the eighteenth century was closely connected to the Liu family. The "old" *Kangua jiao* existed still in 1772 when its leader Kong Wanlin 孔萬林 like the leaders of other branches of Liu Shengguo's network was executed. Thereafter the original *Bagua* network ceased to exist although, as we have seen, there were attempts to revive the old structure with the Liu family in its centre. Of the three main branches *Zhengua*, *Ligua*, and *Kangua* only parts of the *Ligua jiao* remained under the traditional leadership of the Gao family. The last member of the *Kangua's* Kong family was executed in 1786, but by then the original sect organization had already dissolved.[170] What remained were numerous smaller groups built by former members or their disciples. And, of course, the name *Kangua* remained in memory and was still used by many of these groups.

When Lin Qing decided to call himself leader of the *Kangua jiao*, he tried to make use of the fame and reputation of the old *Bagua* tradition. His teacher Song Jinyao 宋進輝 belonged to one of the splinter groups that had emerged from the former *Kangua jiao.*[171] But his *Ronghua hui* (Flourishing Flower Assembly), whose leadership Lin Qing finally assumed, was a small group with less than hundred members.[172] Thus, to call himself head of the *Kangua jiao* was somewhat pretentious. Although Lin Qing modelled his emerging network after the *Bagua* pattern, this new *Bagua jiao* was not a continuation of the old tradition founded by Liu Zuochen. To be sure, sects deriving from this tradition participated in the 1813 uprising, but so did many others with a completely different background. For Lin Qing and his companions in leadership *Bagua* was first and foremost a prestigious name and a model of organization that was ultimately based on the authority of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*

[168] Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China*, pp. 63–117.

[169] Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China*, p. 90.

[170] Cf. Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, pp. 123 f.

[171] Cf. Ma/Han, p. 1051.

[172] Cf. Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China*, p. 70.

易經). They attempted to use the reputation of the old *Bagua jiao*, which had become part of the popular lore, to endow their own position with an aura of religious legitimation. Just as Li Wencheng claimed to continue the Wang family's leadership of the *Zhengua jiao* by reincarnation, Lin Qing himself was regarded as incarnation of Liu Zuochen, the founding patriarch of the *Bagua* tradition, who was said to be a manifestation of Maitreya Buddha. There were, however, no historical connections with the Liu family of Shan county, and the founding patriarch was only a mythological figure whose exact name was no longer known.[173] Lin Qing's *Bagua jiao* was in fact a new organization designed after an ideal model. Most of the trigrams were just names to be used when other sects joined the network to integrate them into an overall organization.[174] It is probably not misleading to assume that the "old" *Bagua* sect founded by Liu Zuochen started under similar conditions and that the division into eight trigrams was most of the time an ideal model rather than a neatly structured organization. However, until 1772 the old *Bagua* network had a common point of reference in the Liu family and its religious prestige, which for almost a century was a powerful social reality. By contrast, Lin Qing's new *Bagua jiao* was a short-lived network of various sects united by the common expectation of great changes, the vigour and skill of its leadership, and finally by the pressure of the rebel forces to join the uprising. After mobilizing more than a hundred thousand people to participate in the rebellion, the movement was smashed by government forces and the remaining pieces fell back to their original state of small sectarian groups. Nothing remained of the great design that Lin Qing had envisioned.

Religious dimensions of the Bagua tradition

The intricate development of the *Bagua* tradition illustrates some traits of Qing sectarianism. This first point concerns the importance of family traditions in sect leadership. For about a century the *Shouyuan*† *jiao*, which was founded by Liu Zuochen in the late eighteenth century,

[173] The founding patriarch was wrongly called Liu Lin 劉林. That this name actually means Liu Zuochen reveals from the fact that Liu Lin's attributes are the same as Liu Zuochen's. He was considered an incarnation of Maitreya and called Patriarch of Former Heaven (*Xiantian zushi* 先天祖師). Cf. Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China*, pp. 92 f. For Liu Zuochen's attributes see Ma/Han, p. 958.

[174] Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China,* p. 90.

was led by his descendants who were the undisputed masters of an extended sect network. Their position was apparently based primarily on the religious charisma of the founding patriarch as the source of esoteric knowledge, which was transmitted within the family. The members of the Liu family represented the sacred core of a religious tradition from which all legitimate leadership derived. Communication with this sacred core of the Liu family had to be maintained to participate in its religious charisma. This must have been extremely important to sect members for they invested considerable resources to maintain the bonds. The leaders of branch sects, who do not seem to have been dependent in any material sense on the Liu family, brought them enormous sums of money collected from sect members. It is difficult to see what the head masters returned instead. But without doubt there must have been some kind of return. Certainly it were no material goods but values that were visible only in the context of the sect's beliefs.

The sect head had primarily a religious function. Liu Zuochen was considered a divine manifestation that took human form to deliver the whole world.[175] His great-grandson Liu Shengguo likewise was called the "ruler who saves the world" (*jiushi zhu* 救世主) and "the ruler who observes the number of *kalpas* and who is able to avoid calamities and misfortune."[176] Hence, the sect leaders of the Liu family had a divine status. Only if we assume a very deep belief in the Liu family's supernatural role even among the top leaders of the branch sects, is it possible to explain the extreme commitment to the head master. As money was transferred from down to top through the sect hierarchy, communication with the incarnate Ultimate was channelled from top to down.

We can gain an idea of the religious dimension of the *Shouyuan*† */Bagua* tradition from a glimpse at its religious practices. An early nineteenth century account gives some details about the *Ligua jiao*. Here the sect master belonged to the Gao family. During initiation, which included ritual offerings of three sticks of incense and three cups of water, the neophyte committed himself to the community of the head of the *Ligua* who was addressed as "Sir Gao, the Perfected who Penetrates Heav-

[175] Cf. Zhuang Jifa, "Qingdai Qianlong nianjian de *Shouyuan jiao*," p. 191, quoting a scripture dated 1701.

[176] Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, p. 93.

en".[177] It was the authority of the sect leader that could open the way to heaven, close the doors to hell and lead the way to the Native Place to meet the Unborn Venerable Mother and enjoy the pleasures of the Dragon-Flower Assembly. Even if the head of the *Ligua* sect was not worshipped as world saviour, he had, as it were, an intermediary role that for the faithful opened the way to salvation. Similar rituals of initiation were probably common in many sects and had a tradition that dates back at least to late Ming. Quite common during the Qing dynasty was the recitation of the mantra "Native Place of True Emptiness, Father and Mother of No-Birth" (*zhenkong jiaxiang wusheng fumu* 真空家鄉無生父母). Other rituals were probably more specific to the *Bagua* tradition as the worship of the sun thrice a day, which was combined with the practice of inner alchemy. It was said that in this way extraordinary abilities could be attained including skills at healing.[178]

As has been mentioned, Liu Zuochen's original teaching as found in the *Wu nü chuandao shu* stressed the practice of inner alchemy as a means to reach salvation through enlightenment of the mind. The rituals of initiation and the daily practices represented, as it were, the external aspect of the *Bagua* tradition. Although they were secret they could be practised by any member. More esoteric were the insights and experiences achieved through the practice of meditation under the guidance of an enlightened teacher. In this context the teacher was extremely important, for he alone could transmit certain techniques and secret mantras that were necessary for advancing on the way to immortality. *Neidan* practices were the core of the *Bagua* teachings not only in its early phase but still in the nineteenth century.[179] In this regard the *Bagua* tradition—like the *Huangtian jiao* and many other sects—taught a popularized version of *neidan* Daoism. While in orthodox Daoism initiation to these practices was restricted to narrow circles where they were transmitted from master to disciple, popular sects made them available to a broader audience. There was a certain demand for these esoteric practices that opened the way to transcend the mundane world of suffering and bitterness. The teachers of popular religious movements served this demand. They even had an interest in gaining many disciples who sought after religious orientation and the guidance of an enlightened teacher; for they received money in return. The

[177] Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, p. 120.

[178] Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, p. 120.

[179] Cf. Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, pp. 144–150.

experiences made in meditation were no empty talk but very real to the adepts. Thus, there was a real exchange relationship between sect masters on various levels and their disciples.

The religious dimensions of the *Bagua* tradition were probably the primary motive to become and remain a member of the sect under ordinary conditions. In phases of extreme expansion, however, as in preparation of a rebellion, other aspects came to the fore that were better suited to mobilizing large numbers. The expectation of great changes and the advent of a new era when the present political order would be replaced was part of a common tradition in sectarian milieus. Otherwise millenarian propaganda as in the 1813 uprising could not have been used to mobilize and unite groups belonging to different sect families. Still, the outbreak of rebellion and violence depended above all on a politically ambitious leadership. It would be wrong to regard rebellion as the natural outgrowth of sectarian beliefs that were inherently subversive. The *Bagua jiao* was in the first place a religious tradition. Considering its early history it even seems that it was politically rather conservative. Until 1772 all sect heads of the Liu family after Liu Zuochen had purchased offices and rank. They were extremely wealthy and apparently attempted to live a life as respected members of the gentry. And they were amazingly successful in doing so. With the exception of Liu Shengguo, none of the Liu family was identified as sect leader during his lifetime, although they did not live in remote villages but held offices. Their social prestige and material benefits did not depend on the mobilization of sect members but on their religious role as teachers and mediators between the sacred and the human. This is not the social milieu that breeds rebellion.

The moral teachings of the *Bagua jiao* had therefore nothing subversive but advocated a fairly conventional and conservative morality. There is even a clear influence of Confucianism. Scriptures that date back to the middle of the eighteenth century show that Confucius was worshipped as the patron saint of the *Bagua* teaching. There he appears as the second human manifestation of the heavenly truth and head of the teaching, the third being Maitreya.[180] Since Liu Zuochen was con-

[180] Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao*, p. 140. The first manifestation is called *Rutong pusa* 儒童菩薩 (*Ru* Lad Bodhisattva). A *Rutong* buddha is mentioned in the *Xiaoshi Muren kaishan baojuan* (ch. 20, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 900b) where he appears as transformation and successor of the *Huangji* Patriarch and is identified with Confucius. In the *Zhongxi baojuan* Confucius is likewise considered a manifestation of *Rutong* and has the role of a divine messenger sent by the Mother (cf. above p. 317).

sidered an Incarnation of Maitreya, he was also identified with Confucius. Even during his lifetime he was worshipped as *Shengdi Laoye* 聖帝老爺 (Holy Emperor, Venerable Sir) who appeared in human form to save the world through the Confucian teachings. And in a scripture dated 1701 the sect's teaching is presented as a continuation of the orthodox transmission of the *dao* from Yao and Shun over Confucius and Mencius down to the Cheng 程 brothers and Zhu Xi.[181] Although the scripture does not show a more than superficial influence of Confucian philosophy, it is obvious that Liu Zuochen did understand his teachings as being in full accord with the state approved orthodoxy. Under his successors the identification with the Confucian tradition was continued, and an offshoot of the *Shouyuan*† *jiao* was even known as *Kongzi jiao* 孔子教 (Confucius Teaching).[182] In some *Bagua* sects the influence of the Confucian teaching was still apparent in the early nineteenth century. Scriptures confiscated by officials contained formulations recalling Zhu Xi's brand of Neo-Confucianism: "Who brings to shine his true nature, accomplishes the Principle of Heaven (*tianli* 天理) and will not be different from the former sages." And in ritual, believers were exhorted to the cardinal virtues of Confucianism: humanity, righteousness, proper demeanour, wisdom, and trustworthiness (*ren yi li zhi xin* 仁義禮智信).[183]

The systematic disintegration of the old *Bagua* network reinforced tendencies towards the formation of new sects. With the main leadership executed, parts of the esoteric traditions were lost. The remaining and newly formed groups had to reorganize not only leadership structures but also their teachings. During this process of reorganization the *Bagua* tradition experienced the same changes as most other popular sects during the eighteenth century. Interaction and exchange of personnel and ideas with other sectarian traditions fostered the homogenization of sectarian milieus that finally made it possible to unite sects of diverse origins in the new *Bagua* network of the 1813 uprising.

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[181] The scripture is quoted by Zhuang Jifa, "Qingdai Qianlong nianjian de Shouyuan jiao," pp. 191b-192a.

[182] Cf. Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao,* p. 84. In official documents the sect name was written 空子教 (Empty Master Teaching), probably because the officials were reluctant to use the name of the great saint Confucius in connection with a heterodox sect. The leader of another branch sect, Han Derong, declared himself to be a reincarnation of Confucius (cf. Zhuang Jifa, "Qingdai Qianlong nianjian de Shouyuan jiao," p. 188b).

[183] Cf. Ma, *Qingdai Bagua jiao,* pp. 141–143.

Continuation of cumulative traditions: Yiguan dao (Way of Penetrating Unity)

The pressure of persecution, which had increased since the middle of the eighteenth century, became extreme after the *Bagua* rebellion of 1813. From a government perspective the policy of repression seemed to be successful for it resulted in the disintegration of extended sectarian networks that could have posed a serious threat to the ruling dynasty. The Qing dynasty was not ruined by religious rebellions but by its failure to reform the political structures. The end of imperial rule brought significant changes not only politically but also in the cultural sphere. With the Republican period a new chapter of Chinese history opens that is beyond the scope of this book. The social, economic, and political transformations of the twentieth century also affected the development of popular religious sects. In the first years after the founding of the People's Republic some of them became again subjected to ruthless persecution. The main target was *Yiguan dao* 一貫道 (Way of Penetrating Unity).[184] While in mainland China this sect appears to have been completely exterminated, it continues to exist in Taiwan where it was legalized in 1987.

Yiguan dao has today a following of several million in Taiwan and among overseas Chinese. It is probably the largest existing religious community that stands in unbroken continuity with the sects of the Ming and Qing dynasties. I choose, therefore, the case of *Yiguan dao* to illustrate some tendencies of sectarian development in the nineteenth century. At the same time the continuity and interaction of sectarian traditions from late Ming to the beginning of the Republic will once more be apparent.[185]

The teachings and practices of *Yiguan dao* are the result of cumulative traditions and probably reflect the manner how these traditions were understood in the late nineteenth century. To recapitulate its main elements: The central deity is the Unborn Venerable Mother (*Wusheng*

[184] For the campaign against *Yiguan dao* see Lev Deliusin, "The I-kuan Tao society," in *Popular movements and secret societies in China 1840–1950*, edited by Jean Chesneaux, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972, pp. 225–234.

[185] The seminal study of *Yiguan dao* is Li Shiyu, *Xianzai Huabei mimi zongjiao*, pp. 32–130. Other studies include David K. Jordan, "The recent history of the Celestial Way: A Chinese pietist association," *Modern China*, 8 (1982), pp. 435–462; David K. Jordan, and Daniel L. Overmyer, *The Flying Phoenix: Aspects of Chinese sectarianism in Taiwan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 213–266; Lin Wanchuan 林萬傳, *Xiantian dao yanjiu* 先天道研究, Tainan: Qinju shudian, 1986, and Ma/Han, pp. 1092–1167.

Laomu) who as compassionate deity wants to rescue her children from the world of suffering. During the two former periods, *Qingyang* and *Hongyang*, she has sent down messengers to reveal the heavenly truth, but only four *yi* (hundred million) of her children have returned to the native place so far. Presently we are in the *Baiyang* period and the mother has sent Maitreya to appear in human form and rescue the remaining ninety-two *yi*. The founder of the *Yiguan dao*, Wang Jueyi 王覺一, is said to be a manifestation of Maitreya and accordingly it is the teaching of *Yiguan dao* that will save humankind.

The mythological images and the basic structure of beliefs are all found already in late Ming *baojuan*. However, more than in the Ming scriptures, *Wusheng Laomu* is the focus of attention. During the Qing the image of this female deity became a common point of reference of most sectarian traditions and the process of homogenization apparently reduced the role of other symbols found in various Ming scriptures. Furthermore, there is much more reference to Confucianism than in most Ming sects with the exception of the *Sanyi jiao*.[186] Like the latter, *Yiguan dao* claims to continue the Confucian tradition and at the same time stresses the unity of the Three Teachings. And *Yiguan dao* rituals are shaped according to Confucian examples. During the Qing dynasty and particularly the nineteenth century, Confucian influence became stronger in some sectarian milieus.[187] The reasons for this development are not clear. As Philip Clart has suggested, it may be due to the social decline of large numbers of relatively educated people. With no hope for any form of official career, some of them turned to popular sects as a way to social influence and recognition.[188] Less dangerous than traditional sects were other forms of popular religious activities. During the nineteenth century spirit-writing cults proliferated, in which many educated persons participated. This may explain the rather traditional and Confucian-minded attitude of these cults, which also affected existing sectarian traditions. Like many other sects, *Yiguan dao* adopted the

[186] Cf. Li Shiyu, *Xianzai Huabei mimi zongjiao*, pp. 69–71.

[187] Confucian influence is obvious in the *Bagua* tradition and also in the *Zhongxi baojuan*, which belongs to the *Huangtian jiao* tradition (see above p. 317).

[188] Philip Arthur Clart, *The ritual context of morality books: A case study of a Taiwanese spirit-writing cult*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia, Ph.D. thesis, 1996, p. 44.

practice of spirit-writing[189] and made it a central element of its ritual. A great number of the sect's scriptures has been produced in this way.

It was by divine order received through spirit-writing that in 1877 Wang Jueyi was appointed fifteenth patriarch of a sect that had already a long history.[190] The line of transmission to which Wang Jueyi belonged was called *Qinglian jiao* 青蓮教 (Green Lotus Teaching) or *Xiantian jiao* 先天教 (Former Heaven Teaching). As most other sects, it had experienced many divisions and reorganizations and was known by various names. Wang Jueyi called his branch *Yiguan dao* and he thus can be considered the founder of this sect.[191] He probably was born in 1821 and died in 1884.[192] The network of his sect extended over several provinces from Shandong to the lower Yangtze region. It was hierarchically organized in nine ranks and the secrets of the sect were revealed only gradually as members proceeded in the hierarchy. Part of these secrets was the name *Yiguan dao* (Way of Penetrating Unity), which refers to the one single truth that penetrates the three teachings of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Publicly the sect was known by other names. Secrecy was conspicuous in Wang Jueyi's organization. Ordinary members did not know the top leaders, which was probably a measure to protect them from persecution. As in many other sects during the Qing, eschatological beliefs and propaganda about the end of the present *kalpa* and imminent catastrophes were combined with anti-Manchu ideology. In 1883 Wang Jueyi started a rebellion that was quickly put down by government troops. His son was captured and executed and Wang died the next year.[193]

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[189] Spirit-writing was a common practice in Chinese popular religion for many centuries. However, it does not seem to have played a significant role in most sects before the nineteenth century. Already during the eighteenth century, there were Daoist spirit-writing cults that produced their own literature (cf. Seidel, "A Taoist immortal of the Ming dynasty: Chang San-feng," pp. 512 f). During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, spirit-writing became popular also in the *Sanyi jiao* (cf. Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, pp. 172 f, 176 f.).

[190] Lin Wanchuan, *Xiantian dao yanjiu*, p. I/189.

[191] The line of patriarchs of the *Yiguan dao* up to the thirteenth is identical with the *Xiantian jiao* patriarchs. The fourteenth *Yiguan dao* patriarch Yao Hetian 姚鶴天 does not appear in the *Xiantian* line. This indicates a splitting of the tradition already before Wang Jueyi.

[192] Neither the date of his birth nor of his death are certain. Some scholars believe that he was still alive during the early years of the Republic. Cf. Wang Jianchuan, "Xiantian dao qianqishi chutan. Jian lun qi yu *Yiguan dao* de guanxi," p. 114.

[193] Cf. Ma/Han, pp. 1154–1162.

Although Wang Jueyi without doubt marks the beginning of the modern *Yiguan dao*, in the sect's line of patriarchs he holds only the fifteenth position. He had taken leadership of an existing sect that was part of a larger network and established his own organization. This was a very common pattern. The case illustrates how difficult it is to define the beginning of a sectarian tradition. Usually sect founders were disciples of other masters and in any case they were part of a religious culture that provided the ingredients of their teachings. Thus, Wang Jueyi is at the same time the founder of a new sect and a successor of former patriarchs. The list of patriarchs reflects a strong sense of historical continuity and an understanding of the teaching as existing since primordial times. Even many Ming *baojuan* stressed that their teachings were no recent inventions but revelations of the heavenly truth that was always the same. It was not unusual to include Confucius, Laozi, and Śākyamuni in the number of divine manifestations that have revealed this truth in the past. In *Yiguan dao* teachings this theme is further elaborated by describing a line of succession from primordial Pangu 盤古 to the present time. After Pangu came Fuxi and the mythical emperors who were followed by the sage-rulers of antiquity down to Confucius and Mencius. Thereafter the line of spiritual transmission was transferred to the West and taken up by Śākyamuni Buddha who was succeeded by twenty-eight Indian patriarchs the last being Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma brought the line back to China to become the first Chinese patriarch. His line was continued over the first six patriarchs of the Chan school and then transmitted spiritually to the patriarchs in the Qing dynasty.[194]

The construction of a historical identity that grounded the teachings on the traditional authorities of Confucianism and Buddhism reveals the self-image of *Yiguan dao* and related sects during the nineteenth century. While they may have been opposed the suppressive rule of the foreign Qing dynasty, their world-view and moral attitude were conservative and traditional. The popular sects certainly did not belong to the forces that envisioned a new society as radical break with the past. In the nineteenth century they rather were part of a nativist current that turned to the past as a response to Western influence and social change. This may be another reason why Confucianism as the core of the national culture became more important in popular religious milieus. *Yiguan dao*, which as a sectarian movement continued the tradi-

[194] Cf. Li Shiyu, *Xianzai Hebei mimi zongjiao*, pp. 51–55.

tions of the late Ming and early Qing, exemplifies in some way the gradual accumulation and integration of symbols and beliefs covering the whole spectrum of religious traditions. It was not just the integration of Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian influences but at the same time of various sectarian traditions. The prehistory of *Yiguan dao*, which can be reconstructed through the line of its patriarchs, shows how during the Qing dynasty the process of homogenization fused sectarian traditions that in late Ming originated as distinct sects.

Beginning with the eighth patriarch, the accounts of the *Yiguan dao* and *Xiantian jiao* about their former history are not completely unreliable. Ma Xisha has identified most patriarchs with some certainty in official Qing documents. In combination with other sources the development of this sectarian tradition takes shape as a cumulative process of adopting influences of different origins. It appears that common classifications and differentiations, which have some justification for the sects of the Ming dynasty, lose most of their significance during the Qing. Sects were not isolated but part of sectarian milieus where they permanently interacted with each other and with the rest of the popular culture.

The history of *Yiguan dao* and related sects exemplifies this homogenization of the sectarian spectrum. Its main ingredients were the traditions connected with Patriarch Luo on the one hand and with Wang Sen on the other. The former was, generally speaking, more Buddhist oriented and belonged to the type of *sūtra*-recitation sect, while the latter shows strong influence of Daoist *neidan* practices typical for the meditational type.[195] In the *Yiguan dao* both traditions came together. As we have seen above, there was also a strong influence of Confucianism, which it shared with some other sects such as the *Sanyi jiao* and to some degree also the *Bagua jiao*. However, there is no evidence of a direct influence of these sects.[196]

More obvious are connections with the sectarian network of Wang Sen and his family. According to *Yiguan dao* tradition, the ninth patriarch

[195] The distinction between "sūtra-recitation sects" and "meditational sects" has been established by Susan Naquin. These are, of course, ideal types. Cf. Naquin, "The transmission of White Lotus sectarianism in late imperial China".

[196] There may be some connections with the *Zhengua* branch of the *Bagua* tradition. Before Wang Jueyi became fifteenth patriarch, he had already established a temple called *Dongzhen tang* 東震堂 (East-*Zhen* Hall). Cf. Lin Wanchuan, *Xiantian dao yanjiu*, p. I/189. Incidentally, the leaders of the *Zhengua jiao* traditionally belonged to the Wang family. There is, however, no evidence that Wang Jueyi descended from this Wang family.

Huang Dehui 黃德輝 was the author of a *Huangji jindan* 皇極金丹 (*Golden Elixir of the August Ultimate*).[197] This book certainly is the *Jiulian jing*, which still is a central scripture of the *Xiantian jiao*.[198] There is no reason to doubt that Huang Dehui's transmitted this scripture, although it is questionable that he was the author. Huang Dehui probably lived in the early eighteenth century.[199] During this time, the *Jiulian jing* or, more exactly, the two versions of the *Jiulian jing* were used by the *Dacheng jiao* of the Wang family in Shifokou, which continued the tradition of Wang Sen.[200] The *Jiulian jing* was among the scriptures that Gongchang, the protagonist of the *Longhua jing*, collected in Shifokou.[201] Both versions of the *Jiulian jing* are used in the *Jintong jiao* 金幢教 (Golden Pennant Teaching) in Fujian, which also originated in Shifokou and is a southern branch of Wang Sen's *Dacheng jiao*.[202] Whatever the exact relationship may have been, it is clear that Huang Dehui, the alleged author of the *Jiulian jing*, belonged to the same sectarian milieu as the *Dacheng jiao* of the Wang family where the *Jiulian jing* was transmitted. It was the same milieu in which the *Longhua jing* originated. It is, therefore, not surprising that the beliefs of the *Yiguan dao* show strong similarities with the *Longhua jing*.

In the line of *Yiguan dao* patriarchs, Huang Dehui is followed by the tenth patriarch Wu Zixiang (1724–1784).[203] Wu Zixiang was active in the southern province of Jiangxi. In 1783 he was arrested during an

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[197] Cf. *Tiandao daotong yuanliu jianmingbiao* 天道道統源流簡明表 (Summary table of the transmission and development of the Heavenly *Dao*), attached to the *Tianran Gufo shengxun* 天然古佛聖訓, no place (Taiwan), 1968.

[198] Lin Wanchuan, *Xiantian dao yanjiu*, p. I/71.

[199] For a discussion of *Huang Dehui's* authorship and life dates, and the short and long version of the *Jiulian jing* see appendix "On the two versions of the *Jiulian jing*."

[200] Cf. Ma/Han, p. 593, referring to a case in 1732.

[201] *Longhua jing*, ch. 12, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 690a.

[202] The modern *Jintong jiao* seems to use only the long *Jiulian jing* (cf. Wang Jianchuan, "Jintong jiao san lun," p. 45). A report dated 1732 states that the *Dacheng jiao* and the *Yifa jiao* 衣髮教 both used the "old" (i.e., the short) and the "continued" (i.e., the long) *Jiulian jing* (cf. Ma/Han, p. 638). The *Yifa jiao* belongs to the same tradition as the *Jintong jiao*, for it is traced back to a certain Dong Yiliang 董一亮, who is probably the same as Dong Yingliang 董應亮, the second patriarch of the *Jintong jiao*. The first patriarch of the *Jintong jiao* was according to the sect's tradition Wang Zuotang 王佐塘 from Shifokou, who might be the same person as Wang Sen (cf. above p. 248, note 117).

[203] The name is written 吳紫祥 in sect scriptures, but appears as 吳子祥 in official documents. For biographical data cf. Ma/Han, pp. 1104–1106; Wang Jianchuan, "Xiantian Dao qianqishi chu tan," pp. 89–93.

investigation and a scripture confiscated.[204] The Qianlong emperor personally inspected the scripture, but found that it contained only conventional Buddhist teachings without any heretical elements. He therefore ordered only to destroy the book and to release Wu Zixiang. About ten years later the same sect was investigated again. According to the confessions made, Wu Zixiang belonged to the *Dacheng jiao*, which was also called *Sancheng jiao* 三乘教 (Third Vehicle Teaching). It further became clear that the sect had been transmitted from Patriarch Luo over Yin Ji'nan to Yao Wenyu.[205] Thus, this *Dacheng jiao* was part of the network that is also known as *Laoguan zhaijiao* or the *Yaozu jiao* (Teaching of Patriarch Yao). It was commonly called *Luo jiao* and represented more than any other sect in the eighteenth century the tradition of Patriarch Luo.[206] However, as has been observed earlier, even in its early phase during the sixteenth century it had adopted beliefs not found in Luo Menghong's writings. Nevertheless, Patriarch Luo's scriptures were still transmitted within the sect. Since Wu Zixiang originally belonged to it, but at the same time continued the tradition of Huang Dehui with its connections to the Wang family's *Dacheng jiao*, we have here an example of the interaction of both traditions.

During the Qing dynasty sectarian differences based on certain scriptures and lines of transmission gradually lost their significance. To be sure, not all sects were alike, but variations seem to be less due to genealogy than to the specific demands and predilections of their members. The sectarian milieu, in which they all participated, offered a range of choices that were not mutually exclusive. It was therefore possible to combine beliefs and practices of various sectarian traditions. There were sectarian groups that emphasized *sūtra* recitation and vegetarianism, which made them similar to lay Buddhist groups. And there were others whose appearance was less Buddhist since they did not practise vegetarianism and *sūtra* recitation, but stressed *neidan* meditation and sometimes martial arts. However, *sūtra* recitation and *neidan* meditation did not exclude each other. In the *Dacheng jiao* of the Shifokou Wang family, they were two different aspects of the same tradition.

[204] The scripture is the *Dacheng dajie jing* 大乘大戒經, a copy of which is still preserved in the Palace Museum in Taiwan (Wang Jianchuan, "Xiantian Dao de qianshi chutan," p. 91).

[205] See above p. 259.

[206] The *Longhua jiao* in contemporary Taiwan belongs to the same branch. Cf. Wang Jianchuan, "Longhua jiao yuanliu tansuo."

The *Jiulian jing* scriptures, where *neidan* practices are very prominent, were also used for recitation.[207] From its very beginning, the *Dacheng jiao* tradition, to which Wang Sen and the *Longhua jing* belonged, was under the influence of the Luo tradition. The *Longhua jing* includes Patriarch Luo in the list of the sect teachers who all have revealed the same heavenly truth. This was not just a formal recognition. We have a scripture from the late seventeenth century that belonged to the milieu of the *Longhua jing*, but claims to have been written by Patriarch Luo.[208] The text advocates *sūtra* recitation, but also offerings of incense and pure tea and above all the cultivation in ten steps revealed by Gongchang. Thus, we find a complete amalgamation of the two traditions.

Larger sectarian networks such as the one built by Wang Sen were usually established through the integration of preexisting sectarian communities. In this way various traditions fused. At the same time the spectrum of teachings and practices broadened, which allowed to respond to the diverse needs and demands of sect members. Just as the scriptures allowed various interpretations depending on the understanding and predilections of their readers and hearers, ritual practices allowed for some variations. For those more inclined to devotional piety *sūtra*-reciting may have been more important than meditational practices. Since the sectarian traditions were in a permanent process of reorganization with new teachers appearing and founding their own

[207] *Yongzheng zhupi yuzhi* 雍正朱批諭旨, Yongzheng 10/11/29 (1732), quoted in Ma/Han, p. 593.

[208] *Dacheng yijiang huanyuan baojuan* 大乘意講還源寶卷 (*Precious Scroll Explaining the Meaning of the Great Vehicle about Returning to the Source*). The copy reprinted in *MJZJ*, vol. 6, 330–364 is dated 1667, but is called a re-edition. On the title page the author is said to be Lord Luo (Luo *gong* 羅公) of Jimo county in Shandong, which is Luo Menghong's birth place (a photography of the title page is on the seventh page of the plates in Pu Wenqi, ed. 濮文起, *Zhongguo minjian mimi zongjiao cidian* 中國民間宗秘密教辭, Chengdu: Sichuan Cishu Chubanshe, 1996). Obviously, the scripture pretends to be written by Patriarch Luo who is explicitly mentioned (p. 333b). The text is intended for recitation, apparently during the initiation of new members. Its content is strongly Buddhist oriented and in this regard resembles Patriarch Luo's writings. There is much reference to Amitābha and only occasionally to Maitreya and *Wusheng Laomu*. However, as in the *Longhua jing* there is a cultivation method in ten steps (p. 364b). Rituals stress the offering of incense and pure tea (pp. 336b, 363a). This was common in Wang Sen's *Dacheng jiao*, which was also called *Wenxiang jiao* (Incense Smeller Sect) and *Qingcha menjiao* (Pure Tea Sect). The scripture explicitly mentions that Gongchang transmitted the cultivation method on order of *Wusheng Laomu* (p. 364a; Gongchang is also mentioned on p. 342b). It thus probably originated in the milieu of his *Dacheng Yuandun jiao*.

congregations, it was not difficult for individuals to find that particular form of interpretation and ritual practices that most fitted their personal needs and expectations. Shifting from one teacher to another was not uncommon. Hence symbols, beliefs, and practices were constantly exchanged between different groups, which brought about increasing homogenization. On the other hand, every teacher and his or her following could select from the available reservoir those aspects that best served their needs. Thus, the homogenization of the sectarian milieu did not exclude internal differentiation of individual sects.

In a diachronic perspective, the development of sectarian traditions can be seen as a cumulative process through which the repository of available symbols, beliefs, organizational principles, and ritual practices permanently increased. Which of these elements were actually used depended on the circumstances, the social composition and educational background, the personality of the leaders, and the general social climate. The more comprehensive the available store of symbols, rituals, and patterns of organization was, the more flexible could be responded to changing circumstances. Thus, within the same sect there could be groups emphasizing *sūtra* recitation and others stressing meditation. There could be times when the three disasters and eight difficulties were usually understood as a metaphor for the world of suffering, and others when they fuelled eschatological fears.

The history of the *Yiguan dao* exemplifies these cumulative processes. Through its early patriarchs it participated in a variety of sectarian traditions. Not only adopted it influences of Wang Sen's *Dacheng jiao* and Patriarch Luo's teachings, but also of the *Huangtian jiao*, which had already inspired the author of the *Longhua jing*.[209] This again shows the permeability of sect boundaries within the sectarian milieu. Still, the sectarian milieu itself was not closed. It represented a religious subculture within a popular culture that also included various other subcultures. One of them was the milieu of secret societies, where during the eight-

[209] The eight patriarch of the *Yiguan dao* tradition, Luo Weiqun 羅尉群, is said to be the author of a *Tongtian yaoshi* 通天鑰匙 (Lin Wanchuan, *Xiantian Dao yanjiu,* p. I/130). This scripture is apparently the same as the *Pujing rulai yaoshi tongtian baojuan* 普靜如來鑰匙通天寶卷, which is used by the *Jintong jiao* (Wang Jianchuan, "Xiantian Dao qianqishi chutan," p. 87). Different incomplete versions of this scripture in six *juan* are reprinted in volume 4 of *MJZJ*. The scripture is based on the *Pujing baojuan* in two *juan* (reprinted in *BJCJ,* vol. 5 and *MJZJ,* vol. 4), which belongs to the *Huangtian jiao.* As we have seen above, this scripture was one of the sources used by the author of the *Longhua jing*, where it is also explicitly mentioned (*Longhua jing*, ch. 12, in *MJZJ,* vol. 5, p. 689b).

eenth century Ming loyalism joined with anti-Manchu sentiments. Although the religious subculture of the sects and the more politically oriented subcultures of secret societies such as the Triads (or Heaven-and-Earth Society, *Tiandi hui* 天地會) were not identical, there were some intersections. The tenth patriarch of the *Yiguan dao,* Wu Zixiang, the same who belonged to the *Zhaijiao* tradition of Yao Wenyu, had a disciple who later became a leader of the *Tiandi hui* and planned a rebellion.[210] Thus, the sects recruited members in the same milieu that was the seedbed of political rebellion, as has already been observed in the case of Zhang Baotai's *Dacheng jiao*. Contacts between persons brought about exchange of ideas and beliefs.[211] It is, therefore, not surprising that some sects were influenced by the anti-Manchu propaganda and became increasingly politicized.

The *Yiguan dao* founded by Wang Jueyi in the nineteenth century was thus, like most other sects, the product of a long process of accumulation of various influences. During Wang Jueyi's lifetime, clandestine organization and political rebellion were conspicuous and shaped the perception of *Yiguan dao* as a subversive force. However, this was only that part of its cumulative tradition which had gained prominence under the conditions of the late Qing dynasty. The core of its tradition was a religious message about the merciful Eternal Mother who offers her children salvation from the sea of suffering and the cycle of birth and death. It is a teaching that continues beliefs shared in some way or another by most sects in late imperial China. The cumulative sectarian tradition, of which *Yiguan dao* is an example, comprises a broad spectrum of possibilities. Millenarian hopes and subversive activities belong to it not less than pious devotion and personal cultivation. Since *Yiguan dao*

[210] Cf. Ma/Han, pp. 375–376. On Li Lingkui 李凌魁 and Du Shiming 杜世明, who had both been in contact with Wu Zixiang before they became leaders of the *Tiandi hui* see ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads,* pp. 290–296.

[211] Still in 1803, after Li Lingkui's attempted rebellion, the *Enben jing* 恩本經 was found in the house of one of his disciples. Li Lingkui had received this scripture from Wu Zixiang (Ma/Han, p. 399). A scripture that was very influential in the milieu from which the *Tiandi hui* grew was the *Wugong jing* (*Scripture of the Five Lords*, cf. ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads*, pp. 225 f, 229 *et passim*). The *Wugong jing* (of which several versions exist, cf. above note 13 on p. 273) was evidently used by a sect belonging to the *Xiantian dao/Yiguan dao* tradition. In the appendix to the *Dasheng Wugong zhuantian tu jiujie zhenjing* 大聖五公轉天圖救劫真經, which is one of the existing versions of this title, the patriarchs of the *Xiantan dao* are listed down to the fourteenth (*MJZJ*, vol. 10, p. 332). A *Wugong jing* was also used in Zhang Baotai's *Dacheng jiao* (Ma/Han, p. 1184) and in the *Dacheng jiao* that was part of Patriarch Luo's tradition (Ma/Han, pp. 398, 400).

was legalized in Taiwan in 1987, it will be interesting to observe how a traditional sect develops under the condition of a modern society and religious freedom.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE DYNAMICS OF POPULAR RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS DURING THE QING AND MING DYNASTIES

In the preceding chapters I have presented a number of popular religious movements founded during the Ming and Qing dynasties to illustrate some characteristics of their teachings, organization, and internal development. It was not possible nor did I intend to give a comprehensive historical description of the religious movements dealt with. Still less was it possible to introduce all popular religious groups. The proliferation of religious groups during the last five hundred years of imperial China made them a ubiquitous phenomenon in Chinese society. Most of these groups were small and short-lived and never entered the historical records. But even the larger ones with extended networks that persisted over decades or centuries are too numerous to be mentioned all. Ma Xisha and Han Bingfang have treated many of them in a book of more than fourteen hundred pages. They provide exhaustive historical information, much of which has been used in this book. However, popular religious movements in late imperial China are not only an important object of historical research. They also give us insight into the internal dynamics of religious developments and their interaction with the surrounding society.

While we cannot reasonably try to reconstruct all historical ramifications, it is possible to analyse certain common tendencies of the Ming and Qing sects. In the present chapter I shall summarize in a more systematic way some of the interpretations presented paradigmatically in the previous parts. I will first discuss the question to which degree the sects of the Ming dynasty are innovative or continued older popular traditions. Thereafter, the main part of the chapter will be more theoretical in orientation. I shall propose some interpretations to explain the formation and certain features of the development of new religious movements in Ming and Qing China.

1. Innovation and Historical Continuity

Before we turn to more theoretical questions, we first have to recall shortly a problem of historical research. The religious movements founded in the latter half of the Ming dynasty appear as a new development in the religious history of China. Beginning with Patriarch Luo, a number of new religious groups entered the historical stage. We are far better informed about their teachings and internal development than about any preceding religious movement since antiquity with the exception of the orthodox traditions. However, at present we have no means to decide to which extent these new religious movements of the Ming were really new in the sense that they were different from earlier beliefs about which we have little or no information. The main reason why the Ming sects appear in such a clear light is that they have produced scriptures that have been preserved and can be studied today. Indeed, this is one of their specifics that might justify to regard them as a new chapter in the history of popular religions. Still, we know that since the Tang dynasty, if not before, there were popular religious groups using scriptures, which were considered apocryphal or heterodox. The use of books was, therefore, nothing new even if the genre of *baojuan* developed only during the Ming dynasty.[1] Considering the teachings of the late Ming *baojuan,* we find that they use a symbolic language that has many parallels in the Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian traditions. So close seem Patriarch Luo's teachings to Chan Buddhism that one could regard them as its popular variety. Other sects including the *Huangtian jiao* could be classified as varieties of Daoism. Since popular

[1] There is some discussion about the earliest scriptures of this genre. This may be of interest in the context of the history of literature, but it is of only limited importance to the history of popular religious movements. There is no question that sectarian scriptures existed long before the Ming dynasty. The oldest known *baojuan* is the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* printed in 1430, but according to its own testimony it was not the earliest. On the other hand, the genre of *baojuan* is rather heterogeneous including scriptures of different types. Normally "*baojuan"* is used as a generic term for sectarian writings since the Ming, although they were not always called *"baojuan"* (e.g., the scriptures of *Luo Menghong*). Hence, the appearance of this literary genre is of limited use to draw a line between the Ming sects and earlier popular sects. More important is the social dimension of the sectarian literature. During the late Ming it was published in great number and openly distributed, while earlier sectarian scriptures were mostly considered heterodox and often confiscated and destroyed.—For the discussion of the earliest *baojuan* cf. Ma Xisha, "Zuizao yibu baojuan de yanjiu;" Overmyer, and Li Shiyu, "The oldest Chinese sectarian scripture;" Che Xilun, "Zhongguo zuizao de baojuan;" Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, pp. 287–289.

religious movements based on Buddhism or Daoism are attested at least since the Song dynasty, it may well be that the late Ming sects do not represent a development as new as it appears at first sight. If we imagine for a moment that the late Ming *baojuan* were lost and we had to rely only on the scarce information of other sources, these sects would appear in the same light as earlier movements. Thus, historical methodology obliges us to state that the only indisputable difference between the late Ming sects and earlier sects is that we know much more about the former than about the latter.

However, with this caveat we can state that the Ming sectarian *baojuan* represent a new genre of religious literature and a new type of religious movement. Whatever earlier scriptures might have existed, they do not seem to have been printed and distributed to the same extent as the Ming and Qing *baojuan.* This does, of course, say nothing about the degree of their doctrinal innovation, but it shows that the social standing of the late Ming sects was different from that of their precursors. Even if their teachings were possibly not as new as the coincidence of available sources suggests, it was new that they were propagated openly using written texts. During the sixteenth century there was no persecution of the sects that produced this new form of religious literature, which allowed some of them to spread both geographically and socially. Scriptures were printed and read, and a distinct literary tradition developed. Conditions remained comparatively favourable until the eighteenth century when the sects became subjected to severe and recurrent persecutions. Thus, there were about two hundred years of development to take roots in Chinese society. It was a development that produced not only an increasing number of scriptures and a proliferation of diverse sectarian groups, but also extended networks, interaction, and wide geographical distribution of various sectarian traditions. Although committed sect members were only a tiny minority of the population, they were probably not less, perhaps more than the number of Buddhist monks and nuns or Daoist priests. Hence, the sects founded in late Ming and their successors in the Qing dynasty changed the religious landscape in China. These were significant changes since they produced a fourth distinct religious tradition in addition to the three established teachings. Distinct it was in the sense that there were clear boundaries of membership with formal initiations, independent organizations, and a cumulative literary tradition. It was, however, no unified tradition, neither in terms of organization nor with

regard to teachings and practices. There was no central leadership or a commonly recognized canon of normative scriptures. Like the Daoist movements before the fifth century, diversity and even competition was paired with certain shared beliefs and similar forms of organization. But unlike Daoism, none of the popular religious movements of the Ming and Qing succeeded in establishing itself as an orthodox, state-approved form of religion.

While it cannot be denied that the sectarian movements as a social phenomenon represent a new and significant element in the society and religious culture of late imperial China, it must remain open to which degree their teachings were really new. They certainly were not just popularized versions of conventional Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian teachings. Of course, sectarian writings and teachings shared many symbols and ideas with the three other traditions. They did not stand outside the Chinese religious and cultural tradition. Yet, they were more than a syncretic blend of diffused symbols and ideas stemming from the three orthodox traditions. There was a fourth element whose origin is obscure. As has been analysed in the case of the *Longhua jing,* anthropology and soteriology differed considerably from orthodox Buddhist beliefs, even if the symbolism relied strongly on Buddhism. The central mythological theme of the divine origin of humankind, its fall into the world of mundane entanglement and the hope to return to the Native Place had no Buddhist or Daoist precedents. Likewise, the symbol *Wusheng Laomu* (Unborn Venerable Mother), which during the Qing dynasty became a distinctive feature of many sects, is absent in Buddhist or Daoist scriptures. It does appear in sources earlier than the sixteenth century *baojuan.* Can we conclude, therefore, that it was an innovation of late Ming sect founders, a new belief emerging and taking shape in the sixteenth century? Granting that these beliefs and symbols do not appear in scriptures of the three orthodox traditions, one has to be cautious not to draw conclusions based on *argumenta e silentio*. Not to be part of the orthodox religious traditions does not mean not to exist. Admitting that the mythological complex conventionally labelled "*Wusheng Laomu* belief" was part of popular sectarian traditions, it is not far-fetched to consider the possibility that they do not appear in sources earlier than the sixteenth century for the simple reason that no sectarian scriptures of the preceding centuries have been preserved. Of course, we have the *Huangji jieguo baojuan*, where the symbol *Wusheng Laomu* is lacking. This may be an argument to

presume that the religious group in which this scripture originated did not use this symbol. Yet it does not justify the conclusion that it was unknown elsewhere. For *Wusheng Laomu* is likewise not mentioned in Patriarch Luo's writings, while it was used in the contemporary *Jiulian jing*. What we can state, however, is that the symbol *Wusheng Laomu*—wherever and whenever it originated—penetrated the scriptures and beliefs of many sects from the sixteenth century onward.

At least some elements of the *Wusheng Laomu* belief had a long history. As a central idea we can isolate that of a female deity associated with immortality who rescues her devotees from death. This basic theme we find already in the cult of *Xi Wangmu*, the Venerable Mother of the West, towards the end of the first century BCE.[2] Although the symbols *Wusheng Laomu* and *Xi Wangmu* are slightly different,[3] they refer to ideas that have some traits in common. Both are imagined to reside in the West where they represent the realm of immortality to which the believers hope to proceed. In the case of the *Xi Wangmu* cult in 3 BCE the deity offers escape from impending catastrophes and death, which shows that the idea was occasionally combined with apocalyptic expectations. The same is true for *Wusheng Laomu*. Unfortunately we have no evidence of this combination of ideas after the Han dynasty until the Ming. But the single elements of this complex remained within the cultural space of popular religious traditions. One of them were ideas about the end of the present time and coming apocalyptic events. After the Han dynasty they appeared in various contexts, among them Daoist messianism and apocalypticism.[4] As early as in the early middle ages such beliefs were often combined with prophetic traditions about the end of the present dynasty and the coming of a new emperor who belongs to the family of a former dynasty. Barend ter Haar has reconstructed a similar type of popular belief connected with the idea of impending catastrophes, which he calls the "demonological messianic paradigm". He is mainly concerned with the occurrence of this paradigm during the eighteenth century, but makes it clear that its elements

[2] See above pp. 31 ff.

[3] *Wangmu* and *Laomu* have nearly the same meaning, both being honorific titles for elder women. *Xi Wangmu* points to the mythical abode of the goddess in the West, while *Wusheng Laomu* refers to the more abstract idea of no-birth-and-death, which as a linguistic symbol is of Buddhist origin.

[4] See above pp. 80 ff.

have a long history dating back to at least the sixth century.[5] While prophecies about a new emperor do not appear in Ming *baojuan*, they surface in some sectarian scriptures of the Qing dynasty.[6] This again shows that late appearance of an idea in sectarian writings is no evidence of its late origin.

Many other symbols and ideas that became standard repertoire of sectarian *baojuan* are continuations of earlier traditions. The idea of three cosmic periods associated with the three Buddhas of the past, the present, and the future, and of catastrophes at the end of great *kalpas* had its precedent in orthodox Buddhism. Even in pre-Tang times there were, however, also less orthodox Buddhist traditions about the near advent of Maitreya, an idea that was to become a latent element in many popular religious traditions. It occasionally became fervent in millenarian movements such as the Han Shantong uprising at the end of the Yuan dynasty. In late Ming *baojuan* the symbol of Maitreya does not seem to imply strong millenarian expectations. It rather stands for the idea of a new epoch in the history of divine revelations following the age of Buddha Śākyamuni. This new epoch is usually thought to have been inaugurated by the revelation of the respective scripture or sect founder. Only in the *Dacheng jiao* uprising of 1622 and above all during the Qing dynasty, the latent millenarianism connected with the symbol Maitreya became fervent and violent. This was, however, no innovative element of Ming and Qing sectarian beliefs but part of a long tradition.[7]

If we do not concentrate on specific symbolic expressions but on the structure of ideas, we find that the anthropological and soteriological conceptions of the *Wusheng Laomu* myth antedate the sixteenth century *baojuan*; for the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* of 1430 contains the same mythological structure using a slightly different symbolic language. Here the creative principle is not called *Wusheng Laomu* but *Gufo* (Ancient Buddha) or *Gufo Wusheng* (Ancient Buddha No-Birth). Like *Wusheng Laomu* in later scriptures, *Gufo* is described as being full of sorrow because his creatures are entangled in the mundane world of sin. To rescue them, he discloses the saving teaching.[8] More than two hundred

[5] Cf. ter Haar, *Ritual and mythology of the Chinese Triads*, pp. 224–228.

[6] Cf. above p. 399 for the *Sanjiao yingjie zongguan tongshu*.

[7] For an extensive discussion of historical antecedents of the scriptures and beliefs of the Ming sects cf. Overmyer, *Precious volumes*, pp. 9–50.

[8] Cf. above p. 276.

years later, in the *Longhua jing*, the same symbol *Gufo* is still used to form a pair with *Wusheng Laomu* as two personalized aspects of the source of all being.

We can conclude that the central ideas found in late Ming *baojuan* had precursors in older traditions. The mythological theme of men's divine origin, fall into sin, and salvation appears already in the oldest surviving *baojuan* of the fifteenth century, and there is little reason to suppose that it had its historical origin there. It is more probable that it was part of beliefs in the sectarian milieu to which the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* belonged. It seems that in other sectarian groups different symbols were used to express similar ideas. In the *Jiulian jing*, which appeared less than a century later, the Ancient Buddha of the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* is already combined with the symbol *Wusheng Laomu*. But still in the scriptures of the *Huangtian jiao* and the *Hongyang jiao*, which originated at the end of the sixteenth century, *Wusheng Laomu* is just one of various symbols to refer to the Absolute. While the structure of the mythological motive is fairly constant, the symbols used are different. It does not seem that during the Ming dynasty the symbol *Wusheng Laomu* was more important than many other symbols such as *Gufo*, *Zhenkong* (True Emptiness) or *Wusheng Fumu* (Unborn Parents), which are found in various *baojuan*. It was only in the seventeenth century that *Wusheng Laomu* began to overshadow them and became the characteristic symbol of numerous sects during the Qing dynasty.

With regard to the history of religious ideas, it appears therefore that the sects founded in the sixteenth century do not mark a significant break. They probably did not propagate teachings that were completely new, but continued and combined existing traditions. The main innovation of the late Ming sects is rather in the field of social history, namely, the founding and expansion of new sectarian groups, and the large-scale printing of their scriptures. Scriptures crystallized popular beliefs to material form and contributed considerably to the social and geographical expansion and historical transmission of sectarian teachings. They also fostered the exchange of ideas within sectarian milieus and a gradual homogenization of ideas and symbols. Hence, the role of popular religious groups in Chinese society changed significantly since the middle of the Ming dynasty. They transformed into literary and partly institutionalized traditions that became a most dynamic element in the religious culture. In this sense the new religious movements

of the late Ming mark the beginning of a new epoch in the religious history of China.

2. The Emergence of New Religious Movements

The dynamics of the popular religious movements of the Ming and Qing is not only an intriguing field of historical research, it also presents rich material for developing and testing theories about the formation and development of new religious movements. At present, the most elaborated theory in this field is probably Stark's and Bainbridge's exchange theory of religion.[9] The main part of this theory deals with the emergence, growth, and evolution of new religious movements. While I do not subscribe to some of their central theoretical assumptions about religion, this part of their theory appears to be a fruitful approach to a sociological interpretation of the dynamics of new religious movements. Since they develop their theory mainly against the background of Western religious traditions, its application in the context of Chinese religions offers the opportunity to test and revise it on a broader empirical base.

One of the features demanding explanation is the continuous formation of new religious groups since the Ming. Even during the Qing dynasty with its severe persecutions, the number of sectarian groups did not decline but appears to have increased constantly. I shall therefore first consider the processes by which new religious groups came into being. To explain these processes three types will be constructed: the "revelation," "entrepreneur," and "schismatic" type.[10]

The revelation type

By "revelation" I understand an individual experience that is interpreted as bringing some kind of insight or knowledge not available under normal conditions. The paradigm for the formation of a new religious movement based on the individual experience of its founder is the Luo movement. Luo Menghong describes his life before his enlightening

[9] Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A theory of religion*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996 (Original publication: New York: Lang, 1987). Hereafter quoted as Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*.

[10] This typology is influenced by Stark's and Bainbridge's theory of the formation of sects and cults. Cf. Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, pp. 121–193.

experience as thirteen years of religious seekership. It was a time when he was trying to find a solution to his fundamental problem of feeling lost in a world of impermanence and without anything where he could feel at home. We can speculate that this intense sentiment of forlornness was partly due to the loss of his parents in early childhood. In any case, Luo Menghong appears as a socially isolated individual wandering around to find a teacher who could offer a way to overcoming his emotional and spiritual despair. For about two years he tried various Daoist methods, but does not seem to have joined the religious communities of his teachers, if they had any. In any case, he did not stay there long. He remained, however, for eight years in the community of a teacher who taught him to believe in Amitābha as the Unborn Parents (*Wusheng Fumu*). Yet, the social bonds he developed in this group weakened after some years and he left the group to continue his search for another three years. After eight years of relatively close social relationships with his teacher and fellow disciples he was again alone. While he was intensely longing for overcoming his isolation and to find a place to feel at home, he seems to have been unable to engage in permanently satisfying relationships. Whatever the reasons for this dilemma may have been, we can easily understand that he experienced his situation as extremely distressful. The common Buddhist explanation of mundane existence as a sea of suffering must have had a high degree of plausibility to him. The cultural system available to him explained not only suffering in religious terms, but also deliverance from suffering. Hence, his endeavour to find a way out of his personal experience of distress took the form of a religious search. Apparently without the direct guidance of a teacher, he finally reached what he experienced as enlightenment: awareness of his being united with the only and ultimate reality, which he alternatively called True Emptiness, Limitless or Mother. It was an experience opening to him a new understanding of his existence that obviously brought relief from the intensely felt anguish of mind.

There were cultural patterns available that permit an interpretation of his experience as enlightenment, which was highly prestigious in the religious milieus he was accustomed to. Since he had reached his enlightenment without a teacher, he could conceive it as his personal accomplishment that revealed to him the truth about human existence, suffering and salvation, and the unity of all that exists. While his insight certainly was conditioned by available religious ideas and symbols,

they were subjectively a new revelation, which laid the foundation of Luo Menghong's ensuing career as teacher of a new and single way to salvation.

Having revelations of a sort that they fundamentally change one's life is not very common. Most people do not have them. We may hypothesize, therefore, that there are some factors in the individual biography or personality that make some people more disposed to having revelations of that kind than others. Luo Menghong's biography certainly was unusual. Before his enlightenment his psychic disposition was not that of a well-integrated member of the society. It is not the normal case for soldiers to become religious seekers in their twenties. As he laments in his autobiography: "Also soldiers who serve thousands of miles away have a home place where they can stay. Why is it only this soul of mine that has no home place?"[11] Given his early orphanage, this longing for a home place may not just be a metaphor. To grow up without mother and father and to have no family in a society largely based on kinship relationships was indeed a lamentable fate. Modern psychiatrists would possibly diagnose the corresponding state of mind as a psychosis. In any case, there are good reasons to suppose that his experience of human existence as suffering had some base in his psychic disposition and his conditions of life. He apparently had no satisfying social relationships that could have prevented him from leaving the army in search for deliverance from his anguish of mind. What he found was a religious community that seems to have provided rewarding social relationships for several years. However, he left after eight years because of differences with the leader of this group. If an individual separates from a group to which he was attached for many years and in which he was deeply involved and has invested a great deal, he usually experiences some kind of psychic crisis.[12] Hence, we can expect that Luo Menghong was thrown back to a similar state of mind as he was in before he joined the Amitābha community. Again he underwent a phase of three years' search for deliverance from his psychic suffering. Even in his dreams he was tormented by his anguish of mind. It was under such extraordinary psychic conditions that he finally found the solution to his problems in the visions of his enlightenment. It is difficult

[11] *Kugong wudao juan* (BJCJ, vol. 1, pp. 104 f).

[12] Cf. Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, pp. 228 f for the concepts *attachment*, *investment*, *involvement* and *turning point*.

to imagine that revelations of this type can be experienced by someone who feels at ease and comfortable with his actual situation.

This interpretation is largely based on hypotheses developed by Stark and Bainbridge. It roughly corresponds to what they call the "psychopathology model".[13] Although there are some weak points in this model, it is remarkable that what we know about Luo Menghong's life fits very well with the hypotheses formulated in this theory. Admittedly, the sources are too scarce to confirm the theory beyond any doubt, but at least they do not disprove it. In any case, the model allows to explain some conditions of revelation experiences that otherwise would remain unexplained. Until we have more convincing and better confirmed theories, it is the best explanation available.

Of course, the revelations experienced by an individual are not enough to form a new religious movement. What followed were more than forty years of teaching and organizing a community of disciples. These were most rewarding activities. They brought what Luo had been searching for so many years: social relationships, recognition, and confirmation of his own insight. In addition he gained fame, power, and probably also wealth. To find the role of religious teacher and leader of a community was not difficult for him, for he had eight years of experience with such a community. The role pattern was available to him and he was unusually successful in it. His teachings were attractive to many people.

The revelation type of cult formation seems to have been rare during the Ming and Qing dynasties. This impression may partly be due to the lack of detailed information on the founders' biographies.[14] Certainly, there were many founders of religious groups who claimed to have experienced enlightenment. However, after Luo Menghong this was part of the role pattern of would-be sect founders. Some similarities to Luo's biography can be found in Lin Zhao'en's, although his social background was completely different. But Lin also seems to have undergone a period of psychic instability after he failed the higher examinations. He reached a solution to his problems through the revelations experienced after meeting the mysterious enlightened master. Since he had not formerly been a member of a religious community and had no experience with that type of organization, he first organized

[13] Cf. Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, p. 158–168.

[14] It is remarkable, however, that many sect leaders shared Luo's fate of being early orphans; cf. above p. 263.

his following after the model of a Confucian school to which he was accustomed. Only as the community grew, it gradually adopted features of a religious sect. His work as a religious leader was like Luo's highly rewarding and certainly compensated for the aborted career of an official.

The entrepreneur type

Successful sect founders including Luo Menghong and Lin Zhao'en became professional teachers and leaders of their communities. It was a rewarding profession that, if successful, secured prestige and income, even if this may not have been the primary goal of these men. Anyhow, the rewards that could be gained as leader of a religious group were without doubt attractive. It is understandable, therefore, that others also attempted to enter into this profession. Above all, leading and ambitious members of existing communities, who accordingly knew how the business works, were tempted to establish their own sects. They became religious entrepreneurs.[15]

Even Luo Menghong complains about disciples who after many years in his community started to propagate teachings without his consent, because they wanted fame and profit. They became sect leaders who copied Luo's teachings using even his scriptures. Since government repression of religious groups was weak during the sixteenth century, there were no great obstacles in founding new sects. The founders usually were first disciples of one or several teachers and learned the religious business there. A good example is the case of Han Taihu, alias Piaogao, the founder of the *Hongyang jiao*. Before he established his own sect, he met many teachers most of whom he left because they demanded money from their followers. He finally joined the community of Master Wang who did not charge money.[16] We see here that there were numerous teachers who made religion a source of income. Without doubt there were charlatans among them, and not to demand money could therefore be taken as a sign of honesty. However, honest teachers still needed material resources to survive and to organize their communities. Even a wealthy man such as Lin Zhao'en finally had to

[15] For the entrepreneur model of cult formation cf. Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, pp. 168–178.

[16] *Hongyang kugong wudao jing*, ch. 10 (*BJCJ*, vol. 15, pp. 234–239), ch. 12 (pp. 259, 266).

accept contributions from his followers to finance the activities of his community. Honest teachers may not have demanded money, but they certainly received presents that allowed them to devote their life to teaching. Piaogao himself became such a religious professional after he left Master Wang and founded his own sect. The richly decorated editions of his writings printed in the imperial printing office show that he enjoyed the support of wealthy followers, who certainly did not allow their teacher to impoverish.

Piaogao's scriptures expose a further characteristic of religious entrepreneurship: the copying of successful methods of other religious teachers. One of the factors that contributed to the tremendous success of the Luo movement in the sixteenth century was the use of printed scriptures. Scriptures allowed to spread the teaching geographically, but they were also highly prestigious. Religious teachings with their own writings had a much greater appeal to the more educated classes than teachings transmitted only orally. Since the use of scriptures proved to be a successful method of propagation, it was adopted by other religious groups. In Piaogao's case it is evident that his writings were created after the direct model of Patriarch Luo's scriptures. This general tendency of religious entrepreneurs to adopt successful methods and teachings contributed to the homogenization of sects addressing the same or similar types of audience.

There were, however, various types of audiences. What was attractive to an educated and well-off public was not the same as what an illiterate audience expected. To propagate religious teachings among the less privileged and less educated demanded to respond to their expectations and level of understanding. Hence, religious entrepreneurs had to adapt their teachings to the circumstances in which they were active. To form large sectarian organizations necessarily implied a majority of less educated members. Since the religious background of these members was less moulded by the literary traditions of the orthodox teachings than by popular religious traditions, sectarian teachings were more successful if they conformed to popular beliefs and practices. This was a factor that considerably affected the dynamics of sectarian development. A good example for the transformation of teachings in response to the expectations of the audience is the *Sanyi jiao*, which was rather close to the literary traditions of the elites in its formative period. As it spread among peasants and fishermen in Fujian, particularly the *Mingxia* branch founded by Lin Zhenming gradually adopted local

religious beliefs and practices. To these popular religious traditions belonged beliefs transmitted through the centuries in sectarian groups. The new religious movements of the late Ming spread into a religious culture where older sectarian traditions and smaller or larger religious groups were already present. The social milieus that were most likely to affiliate with a new sect were those that were most affected by older sectarian beliefs. There was only a limited number of persons disposed to joining a religious community. Dynamic new religious movements that attempted to increase their membership had to recruit new members from the same reservoir in which other sects were already active. In many cases new converts had therefore formerly been members of other sects or disciples of other teachers.

These new members had already certain beliefs and expectations when they joined the new religious groups. It was easier and more successful to attract them by accepting at least part of the beliefs they were accustomed to. Hence, as the new religious movements spread in popular sectarian milieus, they were brought closer to the beliefs prevailing in these milieus. This explains why even sects revering Patriarch Luo as founder, to the extent that they spread into popular religious milieus, adopted such symbols as Maitreya and *Wusheng Laomu,* and the idea of three cosmic periods. These teachings do not appear in Luo Menghong's scriptures, but they were obviously highly attractive. Sect founders and leaders who wanted to be successful in these milieus had, therefore, to respond to these demands and adapt their teachings accordingly.

The schismatic type

The majority of the countless sectarian groups of the Ming and Qing probably came into being through separation from existing organizations, that is, schisms. In many cases the schismatic type and the entrepreneur type coincide. Thus the *Huangtian jiao*, which was founded by Li Bin, alias Puming, separated after Puming's death into two branches. One was headed by the founder's descendants, leader of the other was Pujing, a senior disciple of Puming's. Pujing's establishing his own sect partly corresponds to the entrepreneur type. On the other hand it was a schism of the *Huangtian jiao,* since its membership was divided into two different and, as it appears, competing sects. The death of a sect founder seems to have almost regularly engendered schismatic

tendencies as the major disciples each had their own following. Thus, after Lin Zhao'en had died the *Sanyi jiao* split into different branches, after Yin Ji'nan's execution his sect disintegrated into smaller units, and after Wang Sen's death different groups evolved under various leaders. Less often it occurred that leading members contested the authority of an established sect head. Li Guoyong revolted against Wang Sen and separated from his organization drawing a great number of members with him. Likewise, Wang Changsheng challenged Yao Wenyu's authority and with his own following left the sect.

Schisms were not always due to competition between sect leaders. They were likely to appear if in a larger sectarian organization social cleavages developed.[17] If for some reason parts of the membership interacted much more intensely with each other than with the rest of the sect-members, they formed sub-groups that easily separated when the overall organization was weak. One reason for social cleavages was geographical distance. In the eighteenth century the so-called Luo sects in Fujian and Zhejiang were in fact independent sects not affiliated to organizations in the North that equally derived from the Luo movement. Another likely cause of social cleavage was the internal segmentation of sectarian networks into teacher-disciple relationships, which structured the hierarchies of most extended sects. An example is the "old" *Bagua jiao.* Liu Zuochen, the founder of the *Shouyuan*† *jiao*, which later was known as *Bagua jiao,* organized his sect in several units led by his senior disciples. Although the religious leadership of the Liu family seems to have been recognized by most sub-sects for many decades, the segmentation was the base for the development of independent sects after the persecution of 1772. This shows at the same time that persecution and government pressure contributed to the splitting of sects. Since government measures concentrated on eliminating the leadership of larger sects, they weakened the central organizations and made communication between dispersed communities difficult. Some communities completely disbanded when the pressure of persecution was too strong and the leaders had been executed or exiled. When activities were resumed after some time, new organizations had to be built.

Social cleavage can also result from social distance between groups originating in the same tradition. As new members of religious groups are mostly recruited through personal contacts with persons who are

[17] For the concept *social cleavage,* see Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, pp. 65, 131.

already members, they usually belong to the same social milieu.[18] There was a tendency of single congregations to be socially homogeneous. Thus, the congregations of canal sailors seem to have consisted mainly of boatmen and persons of a similar social background. Although they were part of the Luo movement, they had little social contacts with communities whose members belonged to the more privileged classes. This is one reason why the Luo movement became increasingly differentiated into various sectarian groups without an overall organization.

In many cases the single factors inducing social cleavages within a larger religious movement reinforced each other. Social distance often coincided with geographical distance, networks of teacher-disciple relationships tended to recruit new members from the same social milieu and thus to be socially homogeneous. And missionaries who went to other places to gain converts built their own networks of disciples that were at the same time geographically distant form the parent group. Given the pressure of persecution that impeded the formation and maintenance of coordinated large organizations, the segmentation of new religious movements into smaller units was a natural outcome.

The three types analytically distinguished to describe the formation of new religious groups are, of course, ideal types rarely found in pure form. Empirically there are many mixed forms. Taking again Luo Menghong as an example, he illustrates first the revelation type in devising a new teaching based on his personal religious insight, and second the entrepreneur type in propagating his teachings and founding a religious community. It should be clear that being a religious entrepreneur does not mean to be dishonest. Religious entrepreneurs may, of course, be dishonest like any other entrepreneur. However, they may also, and probably do in most cases, sincerely believe in the religious message they preach. But to organize successfully an expanding religious movement demands more than just having sincere beliefs. After all, Luo Menghong could have been content with having reached enlightenment and keeping his insight for himself. Yet he propagated them and even wrote books to make them public and gain followers. Hence, he turned into a religious entrepreneur, and a successful one moreover. The same combination of the revelation type with the entrepreneur type can be observed in Piaogao's case. On the other hand,

[18] Cf. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, "Networks of faith: Interpersonal bonds and recruitment to sects and cults," in *The future of religion*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, pp. 307–324.

the revelation type can also combine with the schismatic type when a member of an existing group preaches his own religious insight as a new revelation. An example is Gongchang who belonged to one of the groups connected with Wang Sen, but based his own teaching on the claim to having received a revelation from *Wusheng Laomu*. In fact, in this case all three types go together, since he was also a religious entrepreneur.

3. Changing Degrees of Heterodoxy

Having explained some of the factors contributing to the formation and proliferation of new religious movements during the Ming and Qing dynasties, I shall consider more closely their dynamics of development. I will argue that many features evolving during the Qing dynasty are due to the tension developing between them and their social surroundings. If we compare them with the other institutional religions in China, Buddhism and Daoism, we find that the most important difference was their being regarded as heterodox. Of course, there were other differences, but most of them can be explained by the fact that Buddhism and Daoism had a longer history. Their scriptures were accordingly more numerous, their teachings more elaborated, their geographical and social expansion wider, and they had more personal and financial resources. However, these were secondary differences that equally applied to older and newer denominations within the realm of Buddhism and Daoism. What most distinguished the new religions from new developments within the realm of the two orthodox religions was that they became to be considered heterodox. This deeply affected their development.

Heterodox and *orthodox* can be designed as theoretical concepts referring to the relation between religions and the political authorities. As it would lead too far away from the present discussion to develop this terminology in detail, I confine myself to giving a formal definition: In the present context I call religious organizations *orthodox* to the degree that they are supported by the state; they are called *heterodox* to the degree that they are repressed by the state.[19] The concepts are *gradational*

[19] The concept *heterodox* roughly corresponds to Stark's and Bainbridge's *deviant* (cf. Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, p. 124), but is more specific in considering only the attitude of the political institutions and not of other segments of the society (which may

since there may be greater or lesser support or repression. They are *relational* in that they do not refer to a certain quality of a religion, but to its relation with the political authorities.[20] This relationship was changeable.

The new religious movements emerging during the Ming dynasty certainly were not orthodox religions in the sense of being actively supported by the state. However, their degree of heterodoxy varied considerably. Some groups, including Lin Zhao'en's *Sanyi jiao* and Luo Menghong's *Wuwei jiao* in their formative periods, do not seem to have suffered substantial repression by the political authorities. In fact, the scripture-producing new religious groups of the sixteenth century all started with a low degree of deviance. In the case of the Luo movement there was some criticism from the part of orthodox Buddhism, and Lin Zhao'en had to face repressive measures from local officials, but there is no evidence of systematic repression by the government. This is remarkable because from early Ming onward there were laws against heterodox religious groups of various kinds that probably could have been applied against the new religious groups.[21] While there are some sources indicating official mistrust and even persecution of religious groups falling under this law in the first decades of the sixteenth century,[22] the Luo movement was mentioned in memorials warning against the activities of heterodox religions only towards the end of the century.[23]

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have a different attitude). *Orthodox* has no equivalent in Stark's and Bainbridge's terminology. We can describe *heterodox* as referring to a negative attitude of the state towards a given religious organization and give it values from -1 (highest degree of repression) to zero (no repression). *Orthodox* would then be the extension of the scale to the positive, ranging from zero (no active support) to 1 (highest degree of active support).

[20] It should be emphasized that this terminology departs from common usage of the terms "orthodox" and "heterodox". It refers exclusively to the attitude of the ruling institutions towards religious organizations and does not imply any judgement on the beliefs or practices by the standards of a given "orthodox" religious tradition. The claim to orthodoxy (in the sense of correct or true teaching) is made by most religious groups including those considered heterodox by others. However, unless the political institutions take side these are just competing claims. It is thus ultimately the politically powerful who decide what is orthodox and by implication heterodox.

[21] Cf. above p. 210, note 1.

[22] There was a zealous inquisition of heterodox groups by the official Wang Bangqi 王邦奇 during the Zhengde era (1506–1521). Wang used *agents provocateurs* to unveil heterodox teachings. (*Mingshi, j.* 192, p. 5092). In 1525, a memorial was submitted warning against heterodox religious activities (*Guanzhong zouyi* 關中奏議, *j.* 16, 2b-3a, in *SKQS*, vol. 428, p. 474), translated in ter Haar, *The White Lotus teachings*, p. 142.

[23] Cf. above p. 235.

Thus, for more than half a century after the first printing of Patriarch Luo's scriptures there was little repression, and the movement does not seem to have been classified as heterodox. During these years it expanded geographically from Zhili to Shandong and along the Grand Canal to the southern provinces. At the same time the movement split into several subgroups.

Some branches of the Luo movement were led or dominated by members of the more educated and privileged middle classes. They repeatedly edited and published Luo's writings. Other religious groups likewise published and distributed their scriptures, which in the case of the *Hongyang jiao* were even printed in the imperial press. This all suggests that these religious groups were not subjected to severe repression and could act openly even after the first memorials had warned against the proliferation of heterodox religions. There were, however, also other cases. Yin Ji'nan, who considered himself as a reincarnation of Patriarch Luo, was imprisoned in 1576 and executed in 1582. Wang Sen, whose *Dacheng jiao* was likewise connected with the Luo movement, died in jail in 1619, and his successors launched a rebellion in 1622. This uprising confirmed the critics of popular religious groups who saw in them subversive movements breeding social unrest and rebellion. What these critics had in mind were not people who edited books, but closely knit religious groups with a majority of lower-class members. For this type of religious movement, the elites had clear historical analogies. They put them into one line with the Daoist movements of late Han dynasty, the Yellow Turban rebellion and the Five Pecks of Rice sect, with the Fang La rebellion during the Song, and, of course, with the Han Shantong uprising at the end of the Yuan dynasty, and the White Lotus Teaching.[24] Such perceptions were not just stereotypes. In 1596, Lü Kun 呂坤 in a famous memorial presented what could be called a sociological analysis of the sources of rebellion. He distinguished four social causes: extreme poverty, rapacity, political ambition, and heretical sects.[25] For the ruling elites these were lessons to be learned from history. It is, therefore, not surprising that the spread of all kinds of popular religious movements, which Lü Kun and others complained, was seen as an alarming development. The 1622 *Dacheng jiao* uprising

[24] Cf. *Ming shilu, Shenzong shilu, j.* 533, 18b-19a (Wanli 43/6 [1615]); *Wu zazu* 五雜俎, by Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛, *j.* 8, quoted in Ma/Han, p. 722, translated in Dean, *Lord of the Three in One*, p. 100.

[25] *Mingshi, j.* 226, p. 5936.

seemed to confirm these judgments. Tendencies to control and repress the new religious movements were reinforced and influenced their further development.

The Qing dynasty continued the Ming policy towards popular religious movements. The Ming law concerning heterodox teachings and popular religious activities was repeated almost verbatim.[26] That this was not just a formal act reveals from an imperial instruction issued in 1660:

> Since We are obliged to order the world, We have first to rectify men's mind. To rectify men's mind, we have first to eliminate heterodox practices. The three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism belong together, they all induce men to do the good and to abandon the evil, they oppose the heterodox and lead back to the orthodox (*fan xie gui zheng* 反邪歸正). On the other hand, there are evil teachings appearing under such names as *Wuwei, Bailian* or *Wenxiang jiao.* They set up associations and form gangs, coming together at night and dispersing at daybreak. The lesser among them aspire to wealth and profit or shamelessly indulge in debaucheries; the more dangerous mobilize desperados and plan criminal acts. The ignorant common people are misled by their deceptions and do not realize it until the end of their life. If we consider history, we see clearly the traces of disasters [caused by such sects], which is a cause of deep concern. In the past there have been repeated prohibitions, but it was not possible to repress these manners, and those who engage in these heterodox practices have many followers. Even in such an important place as the imperial capital they make loud propaganda pretending to form pious groups that offer incense. However, male and female intermingle, they fill the streets and lanes with great noise and act openly without any restraint. If we do not strictly forbid these practices by law, the public order will be undermined. While the perfidious people who found and lead these groups are fully responsible for their criminal acts, those simple-minded who are trapped in their nets are really deplorable when they suffer punishment. The Board of Rites is to announce a public order: From now, if there are followers of heretical teachings who still form groups to burn incense and to collect money under the name of the Buddha and similar things, then in the capital the censors of the five districts and the local officials, elsewhere the governors, the circuit attend-

[26] *Du li cunyi* 讀例存疑, art. 162, translated in William C. Jones, *The Great Qing Code*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 174. The text is quoted and translated in De Groot, *Sectarianism,* pp. 137 f. Cf. also *Donghua lu,* Shunzhi 3 (1646), 6th month (page 7b) for government policy against heterodox sects in the early years of the Qing dynasty.

> ants, and other officials have to take measures to arrest them and thoroughly investigate the treacherous activities, and to punish the crimes adding one degree to the punishment prescribed by law. If [the officials] are negligent and do allow the breeding of rebellion, the Board of Rites will direct the investigations and punishments. This is a special proclamation on Imperial instruction.[27]

This proclamation was posted in public places. Hence, it was generally known to the population that religions such as the *Wuwei jiao* were heterodox and followers would be severely punished. Since the instruction is not very specific about which kind of religious group it applies to, all religious associations outside the three orthodox religions had the label of heterodoxy and their members the risk of punishment. This could not remain without effect on the development of these religions.

The proclamation shows that heterodox religions were widespread and usually acted openly even in the capital. This suggests that the existing law against heterodoxy had not been enforced before. We have no information to which extent the instruction of 1660 was carried out. In 1673 the Kangxi emperor issued a similar edict mentioning again the *Wuwei, Bailian*, and *Wenxiang* sects, but also *Hunyuan, Hongyang*† and *Dacheng jiao*.[28] However, it is only in the eighteenth century that the sources relate large-scale persecutions of heterodox religions and executions of their leaders. During the Qianlong era the policy of violent repression became the rule, and popular religious groups thus moved to the extreme of heterodoxy. Under such conditions sect members were under the permanent threat of punishment, even if the intensity of repression varied. While the government did not succeed in eradicating heterodox religions, its measures considerably affected their further development.

4. Diversification, Homogenization, and the Dynamics of Expansion

From the perspective of officials, there was little difference between various sects. They often were regarded as mere variations of the

[27] From a publicly posted proclamation, first month of Shunzhi 17 (1660), quoted in Ma/Han, pp. 590 f.

[28] Edict of the year Kangxi 12 (1673), quoted and translated in de Groot, Sectarianism, pp. 153 f.

so-called White Lotus Teaching (*Bailian jiao*), which since the Han Shantong uprising at the end of the Yuan served as paradigm of heterodox sects. It is clear, however, that the religious beliefs varied not only between different sects but also within the same religious movement. On the other hand, there was a certain tendency towards homogenization of sectarian beliefs. Some of the factors contributing to the dynamics of diversification and homogenization shall be considered.

The newly evolving religious movements of the late Ming were different from older sectarian groups in that they expanded into social milieus usually not prone to join heterodox religious movements. As scripture-producing movements they addressed another audience than older popular sects mainly based on oral traditions. After having analysed the processes through which new religious groups came into being, we now have to look for the conditions under which they expanded successfully. Some newly founded religious groups were not successful at all and disappeared quickly, while others were able to gain many followers expanding both geographically and socially. We may suppose that an important, although not the only factor responsible for the expansion of a new religion was its teachings. If the teachings were attractive for some persons, there were chances to convert them and increase in membership. We shall later consider the question what may have made the teachings of the new religious movements attractive. At present it suffices to note that religious teachings may be attractive to some people but not to others. Members of popular religious groups always remained a minority, which means that the majority of the population was either not attracted by their teachings or at least not enough attracted to join a sectarian group. For a number of reasons there was only a limited reservoir of potential converts.

One cause of this limitation was the heterodox character of popular religious groups. Even during the Song dynasty, there were laws threatening members of such groups with punishment. The Ming and Qing laws continued this policy of repression. Most people were not prepared to pay these costs and to take the risk of joining an outlawed religious group. Moreover, to many people the teachings of popular sects were not attractive for other reasons. Particularly millenarian beliefs were of little appeal to those who were quite content with the present situation. The more educated mostly could only despise popular beliefs. And finally, even if their beliefs were attractive, most popular groups could

reach only a very limited audience because they were transmitted orally. These were, generally speaking, the limitations inhibiting an expansion of popular sects under normal conditions. It is evident that the situation was somewhat different with the emergence of new religious movements in the sixteenth century.

Again, it is the formation of a literary tradition and the use of scriptures to propagate the teachings that mark the beginning of a new development. Even if sectarian *baojuan* were mean literary works by the standards of the literati, they addressed an audience that read books and thus had some education. That there was such an audience is evident, for otherwise Luo's scriptures would not have been printed time and again. Hence, the teachings of Luo and of the other scripture-producing new religions diffused into social milieus to which older sects had little access. Furthermore, Luo's teachings were shaped in a way that made them acceptable to members of the middle class. He explicitly distanced himself from heterodox beliefs and groups such as White Lotus and Maitreya sects. Certainly, his teaching was not orthodox, it was not supported by the ruling institutions and met some criticism from the part of orthodox Buddhism. However, it was neither clearly heterodox, since it was not repressed, and even attracted followers who were socially close to the ruling elites. Thus, the Luo movement expanded into a different social milieu than existing popular sects. It was a milieu where it had to compete mainly with the orthodox religions. Since the followers gained in this milieu had some wealth and power, their support was more valuable than what the older sects received from their less privileged members. They could promote further expansion by financing the printing of books and using their social relations to bring new converts who belonged to the same social milieu. Hence, the resources of the movement increased and it could gain a dynamism unparalleled by the older religious movements.

The early Luo movement is exceptional in that it had more than a century of fairly unrestricted development. Until the end of the Ming dynasty, one of its social bases was the middle class milieu of merchants, low officials, and monks. Without doubt, there also were many women among the followers, who belonged to the same social milieu. The situation was similar in the case of Lin Zhao'en's *Sanyi jiao,* and the early *Huangtian* and *Hongyang jiao,* although the latter had a shorter time of unrestricted growth. They all used scriptures to propagate their teachings and addressed an audience where there was barely

competition from older sects. It is not surprising that the scriptures propagated in this milieu contained little that could have been taken as heterodox teachings. Nothing was taught that undermined conventional morality or the political order. Although in *Huangtian* and *Hongyang* scriptures, and to some extent in Lin Zhao'en's writings, Maitreya was mentioned, the context was not millenarian expectations of the imminent transformation of the social and political conditions. Maitreya was rather a symbol for the new epoch when the lost truth was revealed again to offer humankind the way to salvation. From the perspective of orthodox Buddhism, these teachings were surely heterodox, but from the perspective of the political institutions the degree of heterodoxy was low. When in the late sixteenth century first voices were heard that warned against sects including the *Luo jiao* or *Wuwei jiao*, their objective were not primarily the well-integrated middle class followers of these teachings but the increasing number of sectarian groups among the larger population.

The success of the new teachings with members of the middle classes had some parallels with the development of the White Lotus and White Cloud traditions during the Song dynasty. It was exceptional, however, when compared to older popular sects of the early Ming. However, it must not be overlooked that it was meagre when compared to the influence of the orthodox traditions. Nothing suggests that any of the new religious movements succeeded in gaining a large-scale following in these milieus. Their members had more wealth and power than the uneducated peasants and labourers of many other sects, but they did not represent the power elite and remained a minority. The teachings had little subversive, yet they were not orthodox either. What is more, even in Luo Menghong's scriptures, to say nothing about other sectarian writings, there was the spirit of sectarian exclusiveness. These teachings claimed to present the only way to salvation, and to surpass and supersede the traditional religions. Hence, there was a certain tension between the new religious groups and their religious and social environment. To commit oneself to these teachings and join one of their communities did not fully conform to what was expected from a merchant, official or monk. Thus, the new religious movements remained marginal in this social milieu, and the potential to increase in membership was limited. These limitations became stronger to the extent that government policy enforced repression of new religious movements, which moved them further to the pole of heterodoxy.

The growth of the new religious movements in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was stimulated by the support they received from members of the middle classes. This and the printing of books gave them a new quality in the history of popular religious movements. However, if we consider the quantitative dimension of their spread, it was another type of audience that filled the ranks of their followers. Large-scale recruitment for deviant religious groups was not possible among the middle classes. The social expansion of the new religious movements demanded propagating them also in other social milieus. Extended sectarian organizations, such as Yin Ji'nan's and Yao Wenyu's variety of the Luo movement or Wang Sen's sectarian network, had to draw the majority of their members from the lower classes. These members were less educated and less influenced by the literary traditions of the elites and the orthodox teachings. Instead, their religious ideas and understanding were shaped by popular religious beliefs and practices. Even among the larger population, however, only a small proportion of people were disposed to join a sectarian group. And in this milieu other sects and teachers were already active. Hence, the new religious movements competed with existing popular religious groups.

Teachers had to present their teachings in a way that corresponded to the pre-understanding and expectations of their audience if they were to be successful. This applied to the new religious movements not less than to the orthodox religions. Orthodox Buddhism was preached among the common people not in the same way it was discussed in books written for a readership educated in the literary traditions. Mahāyāna Buddhism had no difficulties in promoting devotional piety, the worship of merciful deities such as Amitābha and Guanyin, and the wish to be reborn in the Western Paradise. On the other hand, it taught the emptiness of empirical phenomena and all distinctions, including the distinction between buddhas and other beings, between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. The new religious movements likewise offered teachings allowing a wide range of interpretations and understanding. Their scriptures were not elaborated as philosophical treatises, but they were more than just mythological narratives. In the centre of their religious message was the idea of *returning to the origin*, which was a metaphor for transcending the distinctions of the empirical world and realizing one's unity with the Absolute, the only true reality. This idea could be presented in rather abstract symbols, as in Chan Buddhist and Daoist contexts. It could, however, also be presented in the concrete symbols

of mythological language. The Absolute as the source of all and to which everything will return is called True Emptiness (*zhenkong*) in Luo Menghong's scriptures, which is an abstract symbol. But it is further referred to as *Holy Patriarch Limitless* (*Wuji Shengzu*), which suggests a personal deity. *Wuji* (Limitless) occurs also in other *baojuan* as a common symbol of the Absolute. Often it is personalized, as in *Wuji Shengzu* or *Wuji Gufo* (Ancient Buddha Limitless). Another common symbol was *Wusheng* (No-birth-[and-death]), which was mostly personalized in female form as *Wusheng Laomu* (Venerable Mother No-Birth or Unborn Venerable Mother).

For an audience accustomed to personal deities, the concrete images of mythological narratives were much easier to understand and accept than more abstract explanations of the religious message. To the extent that the new religious movements spread and attracted large followings, these personalized symbols naturally gained prominence. Sectarian groups whose members mainly consisted of common folk interpreted the scriptures differently than groups dominated by more educated members. There was also room for individual members to understand the scriptures and teachings in a way that most fitted their personal religious inclinations. Many sects developed graduated systems of membership that allowed to advance in the sect hierarchy. While these hierarchies were partly of an organizational nature defining different levels of power and influence, they also implied advancement in the level of initiation into sect teachings. There were, thus, exoteric and more esoteric aspects.

The teachings of the new religious movements were flexible enough to allow a certain range of interpretation. They were not only adapted to popular religious contexts. It was possible to interpret them more in accordance with the orthodox religions. The Buddhist interpretation of Luo Menghong's scriptures by the monks Daning and Lanfeng is an example. Others, including Qin Dongshan, stressed Confucian morality in explaining Patriarch Luo's teachings. Thus, different interpretations entailed a certain diversification of sectarian teachings that in this way adapted to the persuasions of different audiences. Diversification considerably increased the potential to expand socially since it allowed to respond to the diverse expectations and needs prevailing in different social milieus. Since the single communities tended to be socially homogeneous, they were likely to prefer certain interpretations and to disregard others that corresponded less to their social and cultural

background. In larger networks or in heterogeneous communities, different interpretations of the teaching stimulated the emergence of social cleavages. Members preferring one type of interpretation would usually interact more intensely with each other than with those who had other opinions and interests. This could be a source of schisms, particularly if the interpretations diverged considerably or were advocated by competing leaders. The split of the *Sanyi jiao* after Lin Zhao'en's death seems at least partly to have been conditioned by different interpretations of his teachings.

Hence, schisms reinforced the tendency towards social and doctrinal homogenization of sectarian groups. While single communities were likely to be fairly homogeneous, the religious traditions to which they belonged became diversified by the same process. On the other hand, communities deriving from different traditions but living in the same social and cultural milieu had to respond to similar religious needs and beliefs. And since they often recruited members from each other, there was a constant exchange of ideas. Thus, they increasingly approached each other in terms of belief, which reduced the differences between sectarian groups of the same social milieu regardless of their affiliation to larger traditions. This is one of the reasons why during the Qing dynasty doctrinal boundaries between different sects are often difficult to establish, and affiliation to one of the older traditions says little about the actual beliefs of single communities. Certainly, the influence of particular traditions was in most cases not completely eliminated. The scriptures, if available, were still used and recited, even if they were not understood by all in the same way. They gave a sense of historical continuity and identity. The single communities of a tradition usually communicated with each other at least on a regional base. These networks fostered exchange of ideas and personnel. This all prevented sectarian groups from becoming completely isolated.

Moreover, contact and communication between sectarian communities allowed vigorous leaders to bring dispersed groups together and to form more extended networks. Wang Sen's *Dacheng jiao* was such a case. However, the more extended a sectarian network was, the more heterogeneous it was. Wang Sen brought together groups that were related to different traditions and used different scriptures. His success seems to be due to his ability not only to unite these groups to a network under his leadership, but also to integrate the teachings of their respective traditions. In Gongchang's *Longhua jing*, which originated

in one of the groups evolving from Wang Sen's network, virtually all known *baojuan*-producing sects of the sixteenth century are listed as parts of the tradition. Thus, there were forces to overcome the distinctions between different traditions and to form new syntheses.

5. Rewards and Costs of Membership

The described dynamics of expansion had their moving force in the attraction that the new religious movements and popular sects had to members and recruits. The greater the number of people who felt attracted by their teachings and organizations, the greater was their success in expanding. Still, there were also factors preventing affiliation to a popular religious group, such as the fear of punishment or social stigmatization. These and other costs not many people were prepared to pay. In this section I shall consider the rewards that could be gained through affiliation to a popular religious group, the costs that had to be paid, and the balance of costs and rewards.[29]

Mundane and religious rewards

Joining a religious group can be rewarding for different reasons. On the one side, there are rewards of a specific religious kind. Salvation, eternal life, liberation from sin are such "religious rewards". They usually can only be obtained from religions. On the other side, there are rewards that can sometimes be gained by affiliating to a religious group, but may likewise be acquired in other contexts. Examples are social contacts and material support. They can be termed "mundane rewards".

The mundane rewards that could be gained in popular religious movements are fairly clear if we consider the leaders of these groups. Successful religious teachers who gathered a large following could acquire many things difficult to obtain by most people: wealth, status,

[29] The concepts *costs* and *rewards* are central in Stark's and Bainbridge's theoretical approach (cf. Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, pp. 27–30). The basic axiom of their theory is "Humans seek what they perceive to be rewards and avoid what they perceive to be costs." *Rewards* are defined as "anything humans will incur costs to obtain," while *costs* are "whatever humans attempt to avoid." They also introduce the concept *compensator* (p. 36), which is theoretically ill-founded and, therefore, not used here. For some of the problems connected with the concept *compensator* see below note 40.

and power. Luo Menghong, who was born into a family of hereditary soldiers and lost his parents as a child, could not expect to obtain them under ordinary conditions. After his death, a pagoda and a stele were erected to pay reverence to a respected teacher who certainly was not poor. Many sect leaders were of low origin, the most conspicuous exception being Lin Zhao'en. Yin Ji'nan and Yao Wenyu were poor in their youth and became rich through their sectarian careers. However, both were executed, which showed the risk of the business. As Wang Sen, who was likewise executed, Yao Wenyu died as a wealthy landlord. Both became the ancestors of dynasties of sect leaders maintaining extended networks of followers whose financial contribution increased the wealth of these families. Transmission of sect leadership within family lines was more the rule than the exception, at least in the larger networks. Luo Menghong's and Li Bin's descendants were still found to be sect leaders in the eighteenth century, more than two hundred years after the sects had been founded by their ancestors. It was a profitable profession that could make families wealthy and powerful. Hence, the mundane rewards that could be gained by religious leaders were very concrete.

Even less successful teachers who headed only small communities had some material benefits. The members of the *Hongyang jiao* who resumed sect activities after their local community had been dissolved after a persecution did so to earn a living by offering ritual services to the local population. This certainly did not make them rich, but it allowed them to survive. In larger organizations, the possibility to get a share in the sect's revenue was also an incentive to actively proselytize, as gaining disciples raised the position in the sect hierarchy through which the contributions of members were channelled. Not all who were attracted by such material rewards may always have been honest people. The power derived from religious status could be used for selfish purposes. There were, for instance, cases where sect leaders exploited female members sexually claiming that intercourse with leaders was necessary for attaining salvation.[30] Given the great number of larger and smaller sects, it would be surprising had there not been individuals and groups taking the opportunity to deceive other people

[30] In some cases reports about sexual exploitation of female members may be stereotypes, but probably not always. Cf. Yan Yuan, *Cun ren bian, j.* 2, p. 153, about the *Huangtian jiao*, and reports about practices of some sect leaders belonging to the *Yuandun jiao* tradition (quoted in Ma/Han, p. 903).

and to gain personal profit. Generally, however, the mundane rewards obtained by sect leaders were part of an exchange relationship between leaders and common members. Though power was unequally distributed and allowed leaders to gain more material benefits than ordinary members, the latter also received some rewards that induced them to maintain the relationship.

Most rewards gained by common members were probably of the religious type. But there were also mundane ones. As has been mentioned, ambitious members could rise in the sect hierarchy and thus make a career. Persons who in ordinary life had no chances of gaining social status and respect could thus experience success and recognition. Still, even without a sectarian career membership could be socially rewarding. It established networks of social relations for people who otherwise may have lacked them. The most visible example are the communities of canal boatmen who often had even no family ties. In their religious communities they found not only spiritual consolation but also material support in life and a proper burial after death. Sect members supported each other, and in some cases sect networks were well-organized mutual help associations, as Hou Biao's branch of the Luo tradition in Shandong. Of course, the attraction of such rewards depended on the personal situation of the members. Those who in ordinary life could easily support themselves and were part of social or parental networks that gave them recognition and material security, were probably more interested in other kinds of benefit. However, for people with little social support, members of poor families, orphans and widows, sect membership secured social relationships they otherwise would not have had. Besides the material support they could receive, there were psychological aspects. Those destitute, who in ordinary society had little to gain self-respect, belonged to religious sects that assured them of their superiority because they were among the elected few destined to receive the way to salvation.

Particularly women in many religious groups had opportunities to gain scarce rewards they could not obtain in ordinary society. Not only was the position of women exalted religiously, giving them same chances as men to belong to the elected ones who will be saved; they could also gain social status as sect leaders. Such equality of the sexes was hardly found elsewhere in Chinese society, although in Mahāyāna Buddhism the chances to salvation were equal to all beings. Yet, the social position of Buddhist nuns was still formally subordinated to the

monks, as were their power and prestige. In contrast, in many popular religious sects women could have leading positions and be accepted as teachers. Thus, Gongchang's teacher Cuihua was a woman who led one of the subbranches in Wang Sen's sect. Three of the sects listed in the *Longhua jing* were founded by women.[31] The leadership of one of them, the *Longtian jiao*, remained in the hands of women until the nineteenth century.[32] In other cases, women followed their deceased husbands or fathers in the role of sect leaders.[33] There were also women who wrote or edited *baojuan*.[34] Popular religious sects, not only the new religious movements of the Ming and Qing, provided opportunities to women to gain status and power they had not in ordinary society. Of course, this contravened Confucian morality and contributed to their being considered offensive and heterodox. It should not be ignored, however, that in most cases sect leaders were male.

With the exception of the opportunities women had in popular religious groups, most other mundane rewards could to some degree also be gained in communities that were not religious. There were a variety of mutual help associations, sworn brotherhoods, and secret societies where one could engage in rewarding social relationships, and obtain material support and prestige. The popular religious groups offered, however, additional rewards. An intermediary form between mundane and religious rewards was health. In many religious movements healing sickness was an important means to attract new followers. A good example is Lin Zhao'en who consciously used his skills at healing to prove the truth of his teaching and in this way convert new members. A great number of other sects also practised healing. It seems that successful cure and the wish to be cured motivated many people to join a religious group. To be sure, health can be considered a mundane reward. However, in popular religious contexts health was

[31] The sects are *Xi Dacheng jiao* 西大乘教 (Western Dacheng Teaching), *Longtian jiao* 龍天教 (Dragon Heaven Teaching), and *Nanyang jiao* 南陽教 (Southern Yang Teaching). Cf. *Longhua jing*, ch. 23, in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 736–737.

[32] Cf. Ma/Han, pp. 689–695.

[33] Examples are Luo Menghong's wife and his daughter Foguang, Puming's (i.e., Li Bin) wife Puguang, his daughters Pujing* and Puzhao, and his granddaughter Puxian. Wei Wangshi inherited leadership of a branch of Zhang Baotai's *Dacheng jiao* from her husband and became a vigorous sect leader.—On the role of women as leaders of popular sects cf. Rosner, "Frauen als Anführerinnen chinesischer Sekten."

[34] The *Puming baojuan* seems to have been edited by Puming's granddaughter Puxian, the *Taiyang shengguang Puzhao liaoyi baojuan* 太陽生光普照了義寶卷 by his daughter Puzhao (cf. Ma/Han, p. 434).

a benefit resulting from the observation of religious rules, whether they were ritual or moral. Hence, health was to some degree a blessing not to be obtained by other means than religious. Particularly people who could not afford professional medical treatment or who suffered from diseases that could not be cured by doctors experienced healing as a supernatural blessing. Considering the misery caused by disease and the impossibility for many people to obtain proper medical treatment, healing cannot be overestimated as a motive to join a religious group. Against the background of popular religious understanding, securing health was part of the general desire to avert misfortune and procure a life in peace and harmony. For the common people there were many hazards of life that were beyond their control. To avert misfortune and attract fortune was a central aim of popular religious practices. It was also a motive to join a sectarian group and practise its rituals.[35]

These mundane rewards obtained by religious means were not offered by the new religious groups alone, but also by common religious practitioners. What distinguished the new religious movements from common popular cults was that they offered salvation from the miseries of human existence. How important these teachings of salvation were to individual believers is difficult to judge. We have no means to estimate the proportion of followers who were attracted by the promise and hope to overcome ordinary human existence and to find liberation in realizing the unity of self and the ultimate reality. However, given the prominence that the symbols *Wusheng Laomu* and *Returning to the Native Place* had, it appears that the hope for salvation and transcending the conditions of the mundane world remained a central element of sect teachings and beliefs during the Qing dynasty. The symbols used to express the idea of salvation to a transcendent form of existence were numerous: *Returning to the Origin, Realizing the Original Nature, Joining the Dragon-Flower Assembly*, this all referred to the same idea: that life as experienced by the unenlightened, who are unaware of the revealed truth, is not the real life; that there is another form of existence transcending the limitations and the misery of mundane life. However these ideas were conceived in detail, whether as a paradise to be reached after death, or as an enlightened state of mind realizing the illusionary nature of all mundane distinctions and the unity with the Absolute, it implied a radical devaluation of the empirical world. If common life was not the real life, then all suffering of the empirical life

[35] Cf. above p. 336 for confessions of members of the *Hongyang jiao*.

could be overcome by following the way that leads to emancipation from the ephemeral world of illusions.

As we have seen in Luo Menghong's case, this insight could indeed bring liberation from suffering. His enlightenment brought him self-reliance and security. He experienced an altered state of mind, frustration was changed to joy. It certainly is difficult, if not impossible, to analyse and describe the psychic transformations going along with these enlightening insight. Yet, there is no reason to doubt that they were followed by a new perception of his own existence that considerably improved his psychic condition and enabled him to become a successful teacher. There is no need to attempt psychological explanations of enlightenments or to discuss the reality of such experiences. For the present purpose it suffices to state that attaining an altered state of mind was something some people were aspiring to. They were even prepared to invest time and energy to reach enlightenment. A number of new religious movements offered methods that could be learned to experience altered states of mind. The cultivation method in ten steps mentioned in the *Longhua jing*, but also in earlier scriptures, is an example. What exactly these altered states of mind were in each case is less important than the fact that they were sought after. Hence, new religious movements offered rewards that could be obtained by following the practices of self-cultivation and meditation. Without doubt, aspiring to altered states of mind implied some kind of frustration with the normal state of mind. There apparently were many people who did believe that the common frustrations experienced in life had not just external causes, but could be overcome by changing one's mind. And it seems that the various methods of self-cultivation and self-transformation were not without any effect.

Attaining liberation from suffering through enlightenment and similar experiences was a religious reward that could be acquired through sect membership and initiation into the methods of meditation and self-cultivation. Practising meditation and methods of inner alchemy was, however, not the only way offered by popular religious teachings. For some, to reach an altered state of mind was a rather abstract idea of liberation from suffering. More concrete were teachings offering deliverance from misery in a future paradise. To be member of a religious group that secured rebirth in the Western Land of the Eternal Mother was certainly attractive to persons who suffered not only from the miseries of this life but lived also in fear of the punishments of hell.

Popular and diffused Buddhist ideas of the afterlife, of the courts of hell and rebirth in lower forms of existence, were deeply rooted in the religious culture. Buddhist and Daoist rituals for the dead and the popularity of the *ullambana* festival for the denizens of the underworld give ample evidence of these beliefs. Against their background sectarian teachings promising escape from the cycle of birth and death and a joyful existence in the realm of the Eternal Mother reduced fears existing in some popular religious milieus. The stronger and the more widespread such fears were, the more attractive were sects that secured a future existence in heaven. As we may suppose that not all people were equally occupied with the afterlife, teachings stressing this kind of reward worked to select a certain type of believer, who thus were concentrated in sectarian groups and mutually reinforced their beliefs.

The same applied to some other beliefs that were part of popular religious traditions. Apocalyptic fears of coming calamities, of famine, floods, and warfare, corresponded to some degree to the historical experiences of common people engraved in the collective memory. Real calamities often had apocalyptic dimensions for many in the befallen regions. Even under normal conditions, there were people living in extreme poverty who had to struggle to survive. In cases of natural disasters, droughts, floods or locusts, surviving could quickly become impossible for those who had only scarce material resources. Hence, fears of coming calamities were no bizarre beliefs of some religious fanatics, but had a very real base in many people's conditions of life. To them, teachings about catastrophes at the end of *kalpas* did not sound absurd, the less so as they were part of popular beliefs since ancient times. The *Wugong jing*, an apocalyptic text first mentioned during the Song dynasty but still used during the Qing, contains lamentations about ten calamities. They reflect at the same time actual experiences and the fear of impending catastrophes.[36] Some sectarian scriptures, as the *Longhua jing*, responded to such apocalyptic beliefs describing the horrors of famine, flood, and war to contrast them with the blessing of the elected few who will be saved to attend the Dragon-Flower Assembly. Like the fears of hell and unfortunate rebirth, apoc-

[36] Various forms of this text have been transmitted with different versions of the lamentations about the ten calamities. Cf. for example *Wugong mojie jing* 五公末劫經 (in *MJZJ*, vol. 10, pp. 264b-265a), *Wugong mojie jing*, edition of 1903 (in *MJZJ*, vol. 10, 286b-287a), *Tiantaishan Wugong pusa lingjing* 天台山五公菩薩靈經 (in *MJZJ*, vol. 10, pp. 308b-309a).

alyptic fears brought together a certain type of believer who thus formed sectarian groups where these ideas were particularly intense. While individual groups tended to be homogeneous in their beliefs, they contributed to the internal diversification of sectarian traditions. Hence, popular religious movements developed cumulative traditions covering a wide range of beliefs. Some of them could become prominent under certain conditions.

Evidently, sects that assured their members to be saved from impending catastrophes had some attraction to people who had apocalyptic fears. And the more such fears prevailed in popular culture, the more important was this aspect of sectarian beliefs. It does not seem, however, that the new religious movements of the Ming dynasty and the early *baojuan* promoted apocalyptic ideas. They were latent in such topoi as the "three calamities and eight difficulties" (*san zai ba nan*), but they were not intense. Only during the last decades of the Ming and under the Qing dynasty apocalypticism and millenarianism became more prominent. *Millenarianism* is here understood as beliefs expecting a radical transformation of the conditions of mundane life through supernatural intervention.[37] The best documented example of a millenarian movement is the *Bagua* rebellion of 1813.[38] Millenarianism shared with other varieties of sectarian beliefs the devaluation of the present conditions of life and the hope for a new and more rewarding form of existence. In this case, however, overcoming the present form of existence was not sought through transformation of the mind or entering another world, but through transformation of the existing world. These were attractive ideas to those frustrated by their actual conditions of life. Sects promoting millenarian beliefs offered their followers prospects of a radical improvement of their conditions of life. There certainly were many who liked this idea, but considerably fewer who believed in it. Under normal circumstances, a radical change of the existing world for the better was not to be expected. However, millenarian beliefs implied that these changes would take place under other than normal circumstances. There were prophecies about a new ruler and supernatural forces that would accomplish these transformations. During the Qing dynasty, some religious movements, including Zhang Baotai's *Dacheng jiao*, adopted such millenarian beliefs and thus responded to

[37] Cf. Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, p. 210.

[38] Cf. the detailed study by Naquin, *Millenarian rebellion in China*.

expectations that in some milieus became increasingly popular.[39] For a certain type of audience the prospects of belonging to the fortunate who join the right side were rewarding. They were prepared to accept substantial risks in the present for the hope of attaining a better life in the future.

An important aspect of the various rewards offered to members of popular religious movements must not be overlooked. While the experience of altered states of mind was to some degree open to confirmation, the hopes for joining the Dragon-Flower Assembly after death or to witness the transformation of the empirical world were not. However, deep belief in the truth of teachings that assured liberation from the world of suffering and avoidance of the horrors of hell and coming disasters was not without any effect. It really could help to overcome fears and to make present suffering more tolerable. Hence, such beliefs were indeed rewarding.[40] Yet, it was difficult to maintain them. It was only in the rather closed structures of sectarian groups, whose members shared and mutually reinforced these beliefs, that they retained their plausibility. Sect membership was therefore essential for securing these rewards. The more homogeneous and closed a sectarian group was, the more convincing were its beliefs to individual members. Since it was actual belief and faith that brought relief and the certainty of being saved, maintaining faith was crucial. In this sense the scriptures were right in asserting that only those who believe in the message will be saved. Maintaining certain beliefs requires a social plausibility structure[41] that confirms their truth. Common beliefs were usually confirmed through everyday communication since they were shared by most mem-

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[39] Cf. ter Haar, *Ritual and mythology of the Chinese Triads*, pp. 284–262, where some aspects of such popular beliefs are treated as "demonological messianic paradigm."

[40] I stress this point in contrast to Stark and Bainbridge who introduce the concept *compensator*, which roughly refers to what I call *religious rewards*. They define *compensators* as "postulations of reward according to explanations that are not easily susceptible to unambiguous evaluation" (Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, p. 36). The concept *compensator* implies that religious beliefs are not really rewards but substitutes for rewards that for some reasons cannot be obtained. However, relief from the fears of hell is no substitute for anything else. If someone has such fears he or she will incur considerable costs to obtain relief from them. This, however, corresponds exactly to the definition of *reward* (Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, p. 27). Hence, the distinction between rewards and compensators cannot be maintained.

[41] On the concept *plausibility structure* cf. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit: Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie*, Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1970, pp. 165–170.

bers of the same social milieu. However, religious beliefs that were more peculiar were easily challenged in everyday interaction since most partners would not share them. To maintain faith in them demanded to intensify interaction with partners who supported them and at the same time to restrict interaction with partners who doubted them. Luo Menghong was very outspoken in this point when he warned his disciples not to listen to other people because this will cause "the disease of doubt."[42]

Hence, to obtain the reward of faith required to maintain close relationships with one's fellow believers. The more idiosyncratic certain beliefs were, the more important was it to restrict interaction with outsiders who challenged them. There were, therefore, various degrees of social closure. Sectarian communities that do not depart much from common beliefs are usually less closed than others maintaining very specific beliefs. The correlate to the social closure of sectarian groups is tension with the social environment. To the extent that their beliefs departed from common beliefs, the sect communities were in tension with the surrounding society. This tension was interpreted in religious terms. All sects stressed the contrast between the chosen ones who were destined to hear and accept the saving teachings, and the mass of unbelievers who did not accept them. This sense of clannishness was rewarding as it nurtured self-esteem. To belong to the elected few who know the truth and will attain immortality while the ignorant rest will face suffering and death, was a belief that helped to remove feelings of inferiority and deprivation. As sect teachings generally devaluated the ordinary world, those who in ordinary life had low social status were assured that in reality they were superior. Sect membership could thus bring relief from a variety of fears and frustrations and offer rewarding experiences.

As far as mundane rewards are concerned, they could to some degree also be obtained in other types of communities and networks of social relationships. Nevertheless, the mundane rewards doubtless contributed to the attraction of sectarian groups. It was the religious rewards, however, that could be gained only in religious communities and therefore were decisive for the expansion of the new religious movements. Some of these religious rewards were also offered by the orthodox religions. To return to the Native Place joining the Eternal Mother was not very different from being reborn in Amitābha's Western Par-

[42] Cf. above p. 234.

adise. To attain enlightenment and discarding all mundane distinctions was also possible in Chan Buddhism. And, of course, *neidan* practices of inner alchemy were common among Daoists. We may ask, therefore, what made the new religious movements more attractive than the orthodox religions, at least to some individuals. One factor probably was the mundane rewards that could be obtained through membership in sectarian communities. Neither Buddhism nor Daoism were lay religions. Buddhist lay communities were subordinate to the *saṃgha* of monks according to *vinaya* rules. Hence, such rewards as the prestige of a religious teacher were not available to members of Buddhist lay communities. Similarly, religious status in orthodox Daoism depended on ordination. Thus, independent lay communities were not possible within the institutional structures of the orthodox religions.

Certainly, there was still the option of obtaining the religious and mundane rewards of religious communities by joining the Buddhist order or becoming a Daoist priest. These were, however, costly options. The costs incurred were not primarily financial, but resulted from the obligations to which a monk or nun were submitted. Suffice it to mention the requirement to forsake family life, which was a cost many would not accept. The lay communities of the new religious movements offered similar rewards at considerably lower costs. In addition, the number of regularly ordained monks and nuns was restricted by state law. Not everyone who wished to enter the Buddhist order could freely do so. The same applied to the Daoist clergy. It was not open to everyone since Daoist priests did only accept a very limited number of disciples. The new religious movements, in contrast, had no restrictions in accepting new members and thus offered alternatives at lower costs.

Luo Menghong, whose movement is the paradigm of the emerging new religions, explicitly remarks that his teachings offer an easy way to salvation, which means that the costs are low. Salvation can be attained "without wasting energy and time."[43] It could be added: and without wasting money. For common forms of Buddhist lay piety were declared useless in his teaching of non-action (*wuwei*). There was no need to pay for sumptuous rituals, to construct temples and pagodas, or to give donations to monasteries. Nor was it necessary to spend much time for reciting *sūtras* or sitting in meditation. Faith and accepting the mantra in four sentences containing the essence of his teachings were sufficient to reach salvation. These were indeed low costs.

[43] Cf. above p. 228.

However, participation in new religious movements was not for free. Some costs were lower than in the orthodox religions, but others were higher. Joining a sectarian group, particularly if it was rather closed, meant additional social control. The sects demanded some commitment from their members. They had to invest time in collective rituals, and in many groups such practices as *sūtra* recitation were resumed. Members also had to invest money, for they were expected to contribute financially to the organization. After all, they had to subordinate in the formal and informal sect hierarchies, even if there were some chances of advancing in them. These all were costs incurred by sect membership. Not everyone would have accepted these costs, but those who did certainly felt that the mundane and religious rewards obtained in return were worth them. For persons who strongly aspired after the kind of reward sectarian groups did provide, there were little options to gain them at lower costs.

Changing balances of costs and rewards

There was, however, one additional aspect that could heighten costs tremendously. Sectarian groups were outlawed. Even at times when the law was not enforced by the authorities, the groups were in a greater or lesser tension with their social surroundings. Already Patriarch Luo complained the hostility of some monks and orthodox Buddhists, although his community appears to have been at the low end of the tension scale. Other sectarian groups had to face much stronger conflicts, as the violent deaths of Yin Ji'nan, Yao Wenyu, and Wang Sen attest. The price of exclusiveness was a certain amount of segregation, which reduced interaction with non-members. This price was high for those who maintained rewarding forms of social exchange outside the sectarian community, and it increased to the extent that the tension between the religious group and its social environment increased. Hence, high-tension groups were not likely to attract many followers who were well integrated in social networks outside the sect. Such persons lost much more when their ordinary social relationships were restricted than others who had little rewarding relationships outside. The community of Luo followers who republished Luo's scriptures with Lanfeng's commentaries in 1652 appears to have been dominated by members of the middle classes. One of them was Pushen, a wealthy merchant. Such persons had a vested interest in maintaining their private and professional

social relationships. As members of high-tension sectarian groups they would have had to face their partner's distancing, if not opposition. It is, therefore, not surprising that they preferred interpretations of Luo's teachings that minimized tensions with their surroundings, such as Lanfeng's Chanist commentaries.

The degree of tension with the social environment depended not only on the teachings and practices of a particular religious group. It was also significantly influenced by the attitude of the surroundings. The new religious movements and popular sects of the Qing dynasty encountered sharp criticism and from the seventeenth century on increasing repression by government institutions. As has been described above, during the Qing dynasty new religious movements, including the Luo movement, were publicly declared illegal and membership threatened with severe punishment. These were no empty threats, and in the eighteenth century persecutions followed by systematic investigations into sect activities and networks markedly increased the risk for sect members. Since punishment was severe, if not excessive, to take these risks heightened the costs of sect membership extremely. Many people were not prepared to pay these costs. They would not join a sectarian group if it was too dangerous, while under other conditions they participated to obtain the rewards connected with membership.[44]

There were some ways to reduce the costs incurred by being treated as heterodox. One was to pose as an orthodox religion. The third edition of Luo Menghong's scriptures published in 1518 had a faked imperial certificate to give the impression that their distribution was approved by the emperor. The same strategy was applied by some sects during he Qing dynasty.[45] Since government declarations often mentioned particular sects by name and officials searched for known sects, it was quite common to change sect names. This is one of the reasons why it is often difficult to identify sectarian traditions by their name. A third possibility was to hide sect membership and to develop clandestine forms of organization. This strategy was successfully applied

[44] An illustration of this point are the members of a *Hongyang jiao* group who disbanded their community because of intense persecution. When the pressure of persecution decreased after some years, they resumed sectarian activities to obtain again the rewards they had lost through the disbanding (cf. above pp. 335 ff).

[45] Statements in sectarian scriptures about imperial support are, therefore, to be taken with caution. Cf. for example the introduction of the *Longhua baochan* where it is reported that the text was presented to the throne and approved by the emperor in 1599 (in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 751).

for many decades by the "old" *Bagua jiao* founded by Liu Zuochen. Until 1772 the sect leaders were not identified although they acted in public as local officials.

The incentive to obtain the mundane and religious rewards offered by sect membership was thus restrained by the costs connected with it. The balance of costs and rewards was not constant. High tension incurred higher costs than low tension with the surroundings, and tension varied. Also rewards were different. Some rewards were more valuable to certain types of members than to others. To the canal boatmen the mundane rewards, such as mutual help, shelter, and material support, were more important than to well-off members of the middle classes. Hence, everyone had to make his own balance of costs and rewards.

The changing balance of costs and rewards helps to explain some features in the historical development of popular religious movements. The most important observation is that the costs of sect membership steadily increased from the early sixteenth to the early nineteenth century because government repression became more intense. Hence, to accept these high costs demanded that the value of the rewards was also very high. Now, the value of certain types of costs and rewards was different for different individuals. Wealthy people could much easier make financial contributions than poor ones. On the other hand, social segregation and repression was easier to accept by those who were marginalized and disprivileged anyway. Some people had little to lose. For them the certainty of attaining immortality in a heavenly paradise could possibly outweigh the risk of being punished.

In general, increasing repression moved religious groups to the high end of heterodoxy and tension with the environment. The members most affected by this process were those belonging to the more privileged milieus. They had much to lose: wealth, status, and social relationships. Since costs of membership in heterodox communities rose disproportionately for such members, their balance of costs and rewards worsened. Hence, we can expect that the proportion of upper and middle class members in popular religious movements decreased as repression increased. It appears that exactly this was the case after the Ming dynasty. While during the late Ming many sects even enjoyed the support and patronage of high officials and aristocrats, and wealthy members secured the printing of their scriptures, during the Qing dynasty these connections had been cut. The printing of sectarian scriptures was no longer

financed by rich donators but by the small contributions of members who apparently were not wealthy.[46] The painstaking investigations by government officials in the eighteenth century showed that sect members belonged almost exclusively to the lower classes, the main exception being those whose families had gained wealth and status as sect leaders. For them, of course, the balance was different since they gained considerable material rewards through their sectarian activities, which ordinary members did not. Repression thus worked as a selective mechanism narrowing the social spectrum of membership. The proportion of middle class members lessened markedly while lower class membership became dominant.[47]

Yet repression and persecution also increased the costs of sect membership for common folk. They may have had less to lose, but punishment still was deterrent. High costs made other religious groups more attractive that offered similar rewards without inflicting the risk of punishment. We should expect, therefore, that lay communities connected with orthodox Buddhism grew in membership at the expense of popular sects. Unfortunately, I have not been able to confirm this hypothesis that must await further research.[48] In any case, the high costs of heterodoxy imposed by government persecution demanded high rewards to be accepted. Many religious rewards could be gained at lower costs from less dangerous forms of religion. There were, however, some religious rewards offered only by heterodox religious groups.

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[46] Cf. Daniel Overmyer, "Values in Chinese sectarian literature," p. 229.

[47] There were also exceptions to this rule. The *Liumen jiao* 劉門教, which was founded by Liu Yuan 劉沅 in the early years of the nineteenth century, had numerous degree-holders among its members, including over hundred *jinshi* 進士 (cf. Ma/Han, p. 1353). It was apparently not regarded as heterodox by the government because it was based on Confucian teachings. Since it was a new movement not deriving from one of the by then older sects, it was possibly judged as a different type of organization. During the nineteenth century the influence of Confucianism generally became stronger in popular religious groups. The reasons for this tendency deserve further study.

[48] That during the Qing dynasty lay Buddhism was stronger than in any former dynasty is suggested by the appearance of two collections with biographies of the Buddhist laity, the *Jushi zhuan* 居士傳 (in *WXZJ*, vol. 149) and the *Shan nüren zhuan* 善女人傳 (in *WXZJ*, vol. 150). These seem to be the first biographical works devoted exclusively to laypersons (Christoph Kleine, *Religiöse Biographien im ostasiatischen Buddhismus*, Marburg: University of Marburg, Habilitationsschrift, 2001, pp. 164 f). The *Shan nüren zhuan* was the first collection of biographies of Buddhist women since the *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 (T 2063) of 516. For this work cf. Gabriele Goldfuss, "Die Biographien von Laienbuddhistinnen des Peng Shaosheng," *Newsletter Frauen und China*, 6 (1994), pp. 19–31.

One of them was the promise to belong to the chosen ones who will survive impending catastrophes or attain high status after the transformation of the existing conditions. Surely, these were extreme forms, but it appears that apocalyptic and millenarian tendencies were markedly stronger in the sects of the Qing than in their Ming dynasty precursors. These tendencies did not necessarily culminate in millenarian rebellions, for it was *belief* in one's future betterment that was rewarding, and not violent political action. Yet, since millenarian beliefs were always considered heterodox by the authorities, they increased the tension with the surroundings. Accordingly, the costs incurred by sect membership rose disproportionately for those who were socially well-integrated. Millenarian beliefs were, therefore, attractive only to marginalized people who had low stakes in social conformity: Those who could not hope to improve their situation by conforming to the expectations of the elites because they saw no chances of any improvement, had little to lose by high tension. They had low stakes in conformity.[49] Sectarian beliefs gave them at least the hope to be finally at the winning side. Hence, certain heterodox beliefs such as millenarianism attracted above all individuals at the lower end of the social scale. Such beliefs had the same selective effect on the social composition of membership as increased repression, since in both cases the tension was heightened. Both factors reinforced each other.

These considerations explain to some extent why the new religious movements founded in late Ming underwent significant changes in membership structure during the eighteenth century. It also explains certain modifications in their beliefs. The described tendencies did, however, not apply to all sectarian groups. There were counteractive forces. Some sectarian groups would attempt to reduce the degree of heterodoxy in order to be less exposed to government repression. They would thus approach common lay Buddhist communities as, for example, *sūtra*-recitation groups. Or they would take roles similar to Buddhist and Daoist priests offering ritual services to the local population. Unless in cases of overreaction by the government, they were not persecuted and therefore appear rarely in official reports. We may be sure, however, that their number was far higher than these reports reveal. In general, sectarian communities whose members had higher stakes in conformity since they were more integrated in the ordinary society, even if they

[49] For the concept *stakes in conformity* cf. Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, p. 190 f.

were common folk, would attempt to reduce tension with their surroundings to maintain exchange relationships.

Stakes in conformity were not constant. They increased, among others, when individuals or groups improved their social status in the surrounding society. Now, there was one type of sect member who often improved their social status. Some sect leaders became very wealthy and they usually transmitted leadership of the sect to their descendants. These families of hereditary sect leaders could amass immense fortunes. Not a few of them attempted to convert the social status they had within sect structures into officially recognized social status. As owners of estates they could be respected members of the gentry if one of their relatives held government office or an official degree. Wealthy people could obtain both by purchase. This is exactly what many sect leaders did. The most striking example are Liu Zuochen's descendants who inherited leadership of the *Shouyuan*† *jiao*/*Bagua jiao*. They all were local officials by purchase or at least degree holders. Likewise, members of the Gao family, who were leaders of the *Ligua jiao,* had official rank in the early nineteenth century. There were many other such cases. And it was not only the top level leaders of large sectarian networks, such as the Wang family in Shifokou, who had gained some wealth, but also, if on a smaller scale, the leaders of subbranches and less extended sects. Wealthy families, even if they were not part of the gentry, had much higher stakes in conformity than sect members belonging to marginalized social milieus. Government measures could easily deprive them of their whole fortune, which in fact often happened. Hence, such sect leaders had a vested interest in keeping tension with the surroundings at a low level. Common sect members possibly had different interests, which could be a source of schisms when more radical groups separated from the main sect.

This line of argument explains why families of hereditary sect leaders were rarely involved in rebellions. Even in the 1622 *Dacheng jiao* rebellion, leadership was not in the hand of Wang Sen's son Wang Haoxian but of Xu Hongru.[50] His descendants, the Wang family in Shifokou, would have been the born leaders of the sect networks in Zhili formed in preparation of the 1813 rebellion, had they aspired to

[50] Cf. Li Jixian, "Bailian jiaozhu Wang Sen, Wang Haoxian bu shi nongmin qiyi lingxiu."

be. They preferred instead not to be involved.[51] Likewise, the members of the Gao family, who led the *Ligua* branch of the *Bagua jiao*, kept apart whereas some groups belonging to this branch participated in the rebellion. To be sure, this did not prevent these families from being persecuted as leaders of heterodox sects. It indicates, however, that they were not the driving forces of rebellion. These usually were sectarians with lower stakes in conformity such as Lin Qing.

There were thus two conflicting tendencies of sect development during the Qing dynasty. Groups whose members were mostly socially marginalized people with low stakes in conformity had little reason to reduce tension. They were, therefore, more inclined to accept millenarian teachings, which offered high religious rewards. And they were more likely to participate in violent actions.[52] Groups whose members had higher stakes in conformity tended to reduce tension and keep it on a moderate level. Usually, successful religious movements persisting over a longer span of time experience some changes of membership. In contrast to newly founded sects whose members are recruited through conversion, established sects have a large, sometimes overwhelming number of members socialized within the movement. In these cases affiliation to a religious group is not prompted by the desire to gain certain religious rewards, such as salvation or rescue from impending catastrophes, but by family tradition. Unless interaction with non-members is starkly restricted, many of these born members will be more involved in the affairs of the surrounding society than their parents. Thus, they have higher stakes in conformity. For a number of reasons, second and third generation members of sects are usually less inclined to sacrifice the mundane rewards that can be obtained through interaction with the ordinary society for the religious rewards offered by high tension groups. Hence, there is a general tendency for religious movements, as they develop, to reduce tension and to become more integrated in the surrounding society.[53]

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[51] It should be noted, however, that among the scriptures transmitted within the Wang family was also a text indicating millenarian expectations.

[52] For factors influencing the decision to rebel or not to rebel cf. James W. Tong, *Disorder Under Heaven. Collective Violence in the Ming Dynasty*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992, pp. 83–95.

[53] For a detailed explanation of the social mechanisms leading to a reduction of tension see Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, pp. 267–278. In common sociological language this process is described as movement from sect-like to church-like religious organizations.

It is to be expected, therefore, that the sects of the Qing dynasty, too, tended to reduce tension as their membership shifted from a converted to a socialized base. There is some evidence that this actually was often the case. Most of the sectarian communities did not stand in high tension with their surroundings. Not only is there only a small number of sectarian groups that were involved in actual rebellion during the Qing;[54] also the number of sectarian groups mentioned in official reports was small when compared to the number of groups that existed in the whole country.[55] It seems that the rebellions of the Qing were not initiated by sectarian groups consisting mainly of members of the socialized type. Instead, leaders of rebellions usually built their own networks that resembled more new sects than established sectarian traditions transmitted through the generations within families. Hence, while there was a tendency of established sects to accommodate to the surrounding society and to reduce tension, there were on the other hand new sectarian groups emerging that stood in higher tension.[56] The tendency towards accommodation and tension reduction can be described as a movement from the pole of heterodoxy to orthodoxy. The less a religious group deviates from the norms and values of the surrounding society, the less those who maintain these norms are prompted to repress it. Ironically, it appears that this normal development was to some degree obstructed by the government policy to repress sectarian groups without paying much attention to the differences among them. In this way, even sects attempting to reduce tension remained heterodox and thus in relatively high tension, and were impeded in transforming into mainstream orthodox religious movements.

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[54] It should be noted that official sources often reported that a certain sect "rebelled" (*fan* 反) even if there were no violent actions. Since sect activities were generally outlawed, they could always be taken as violations of the political order if the authorities were searching for such cases.

[55] That there must have been many more sectarian groups than reported about is evident. In many cases where sectarian activities were uncovered, the investigations could trace their traditions back over several generations. This implies that they formerly remained unnoticed or, what is more probable, were often ignored because they were inconspicuous religious groups. We can conclude that the majority of sectarian groups was usually more or less integrated in the society and had a low degree of tension with it.

[56] Compare Stark's and Bainbridge's proposition: "Movement of a high-tension religious body towards lower tension creates both a cadre and a constituency for a new sect movement" (Stark/Bainbridge, *Theory*, p. 278).

The described processes of tension reduction of established religious communities and the emergence of high tension new sects have been theoretically analysed by Stark and Bainbridge. At present, it is certainly too early to state that their theory can be confirmed by the development of popular sects during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Much more research has to be done with regard to many hypotheses they formulate. However, what we can state is that our knowledge about Chinese religious movements does not falsify the theory, which may, therefore, be a useful guide to define fields of future research.

EPILOGUE

POPULAR RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND ELITE CULTURE

From the Han dynasty down to the end of imperial rule, popular religious movements were part of Chinese religious culture. Although official sources rarely pay any attention to them, unless they were involved in political rebellion, there is sufficient evidence that popular religious movements were more than occasional episodes of religious deviance in a society otherwise dominated religiously by the orthodox traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. The popular religious movements reported in historical sources before the Ming dynasty rather appear as the visible peaks of a religious landscape that mostly remains hidden in the mist of historical oblivion. Like the tip of an iceberg they had a much larger base below the surface, which was the stream of popular religious life. Popular religious culture was a turbulent flow that was difficult to control and to channel into the calmer current of the orthodox traditions. Time and again these turbulences swelled and sometimes they swept away dynasties. But usually they remained deep below the surface without affecting the stream of history.

Much like traditional Chinese historiography, most modern historical studies of Chinese religion concentrate on the traditions of the orthodox teachings. In contrast, empirical research on contemporary religions in China focusing on the grassroots of society has revealed a remarkable vitality of popular religion, while the literate manifestations of religions in modern China attract little attention of scholars. It appears as if religion in traditional China had been dominated by the culture of the intellectual elites, whereas in modern China it were reduced to the popular culture. However, there is little reason to suppose that popular religions were less vigorous in traditional China than they are today, nor that they were much more influenced by the literate traditions of the elite culture. To gain a more balanced picture of Chinese religious history, we have to include those religious traditions that were not part of the elite culture.

Once popular culture is made the object of historical research, it appears that it is far more diversified than the dichotomy of elite and

popular culture suggests.[1] Likewise, to talk of "popular religion" and "popular religious movements" is an expedient means to reduce the complexity of religious life in traditional China. On closer view, "popular religion" appears as a catch-all term for any religious manifestation that was not part of the elite culture. It covers local and communal cults in different regions and at different times, as well as various forms of Buddhist lay piety, communal festivals, shamans, spirit-mediums, and soothsayers, and to some extent Daoist priests and Buddhist monks of low education. And, of course, it includes sect movements that formed religious communities uncontrolled by the official clergy and gathered followers from various layers of society. The religious movements treated in this book belonged to this heterogeneous religious culture, but it is evident that they represented only a small part of it. They originated over a period of two thousand years in different regions of the Chinese world, which precludes any hasty generalizations. The Five Pecks of Rice community in Sichuan during the late Han dynasty did not have much in common with the Luo movement in the North during late Ming times. Neither beliefs and rituals, nor the social organizations were similar. They do not share much more than having been religious communities outside the reach of state control. This, however, is more significant than it might appear at first sight.

Beneath the surface of elite culture there were religious forces that could develop a sensible social dynamism. They were able to bring together large numbers of people of various social backgrounds to form communities. These communities were not based on kinship or residence, nor did they correspond to any other form of social congregation endorsed by law or official custom; they were voluntary associations of people united by common religious beliefs. The dynamics of such religious communities is apparent not only in their establishing new social relationships, mobilizing human and material resources, and promoting concerted action; many of them became the origin of lasting traditions that for centuries influenced the social and religious life. In the case of the Five Pecks of Rice community, the tradition finally merged with the evolving Daoist orthodoxy, while the tradition founded by Patriarch Luo never succeeded in being accepted as part

[1] Cf. David Johnson, "Communication, class, and consciousness in late imperial China," in *Popular culture in late imperial China*, edited by David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan and Evelyn Rawski (Studies on China; 4), Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1985, pp. 34–72.

of the elite culture. In any case, however, these and many other popular religious communities moved something, they had a dynamism of their own that to some extent changed Chinese society and culture. In this sense we are entitled to call them popular religious *movements*, even if most of them were only short-lived. But taken together they formed a dynamic element in Chinese society that brought about effects that were neither anticipated nor controlled by the elites.

The second point to be observed is the exclusion of these popular religious movements from elite culture and their ambiguous relationship to the latter. The ruling elites usually despised and rejected them as heterodox, and often attempted to suppress them. One may be inclined, therefore, to see popular religious movements as a lower class phenomenon. Indeed, as in any large-scale social movement the majority of participants usually belonged to the legion of underprivileged and depressed since it was they who represented the majority of the Chinese population. However, we must not overlook that in many popular religious movements scriptures played an important role. Evidently, some of their members could write and read these scriptures and, therefore, must have had some education. Even the earliest examples of sect movements during the Han dynasty witness the use of scriptures, and we can be sure that Gong Chong, who personally presented the *Taiping jing* to the throne was not an illiterate peasant. The history of popular religious movements is to some degree a history of written texts, although most of them are lost. The periodical destruction of heterodox religious scriptures, along with the laws threatening severe punishments for their possession and distribution, reveal that popular religious culture was more than just oral traditions. We rarely know much about these scriptures except that they were excluded from the literary tradition of the elites because they reportedly contained strange accounts of gods and future events. However, we do know that these books were written and distributed by persons who certainly did not belong to the very lowest level of society. They probably neither belonged to the elites, but they were literate and thus had some intermediary position.

The use of scriptures and the obvious literacy of some sect members give us some impression of the location of popular religious movements in Chinese society. There doubtless were many groups that had no books and whose members were illiterate. They were at the low end of the social scale, with the ruling elites as the opposite pole. Those

groups, however, that did use books were not confined to members from the bottom of society; literacy indicates a certain degree of formal education and therefore to some extent economic prosperity. Those who had to struggle for survival had neither the time nor the means to give their children a formal education. Although the degree of general literacy varied in different epochs, we can certainly say that the majority of the male population was illiterate, not to mention the women. Reading and above all writing books, while not having been confined to elites, were indicators of a position in the upper part of the social scale. These men and occasionally also women may not have belonged to the legally privileged elites, but they were closer to the elite milieu than most of the populace. Since some of them participated in popular religious movements, we can conclude that these movements penetrated all layers of the society below the top level of the politically powerful and their intellectual associates. This gives some idea of the location of popular religious sects within Chinese society, although it says nothing about their quantitative dimension. Popular religious movements were one aspect of the religious life. While they probably were only a small part of it most of the time, they nevertheless had their roots and branches in the whole of society and were not limited to the margins, to the poor and illiterate.

These are, of course, very general observations. Not every single sect had members from all layers of society. As has been explained in the analysis of Ming and Qing sects, individual groups rather tended to be socially homogeneous. However, taken together, popular religious sects were a widespread social and religious phenomenon. From a sociological point of view, they represented a particular type of religious organization that existed besides the structures of Buddhism and Daoism, and the various local and communal cults. As a social form of religion they continued through the centuries and were thus part of Chinese religious culture. Much less clear is it to which degree there was a continuity of individual sectarian traditions. In some cases it is evident that popular religious groups endured over many generations. Most remarkable is the tradition of the Heavenly Masters, whose ancestor was called a "rice thief", but which underwent the successful transformation from a popular sect to a state-supported church. Other popular religious movements with long lasting influence were Mao Ziyuan's White Lotus movement and the teachings of Patriarch Luo. Still, most popular

religious sects seem to have been ephemeral phenomena. This impression is without doubt partly due to the lack of historical sources, and we may assume that there were many sects of smaller size persisting over generations without having left any traces. On the other hand it cannot be doubted that most popular religious groups were short-lived as social organizations. They formed around individual leaders who usually drew their teachings from the large stock of commonly available ideas and symbols. Few of them would have added very new elements, and even less would have been able to combine religious or intellectual ingenuity with skills at leadership and organization. Where there was little originality in teachings and weak organization, it was difficult to build voluntary communities that survived the first generation of members. What endured were not the individual groups but the ideas and beliefs that permeated the popular religious culture.

Cultural Space and the Condensation of Symbols

There is an amazing recurrence of symbols and ideas appearing in popular religious movements over two millenniums. Some of these apparent continuities have been described in the last chapter. Suffice it to mention the figure of a female deity residing in the western realm of immortality, which can be found with the cult of *Xi Wangmu* in the Former Han dynasty as well as with the belief in *Wusheng Laomu* in late imperial China. It would be possible to make a long list of symbols and ideas that surface in popular religious milieus separated in time and space without having any traceable historical connections. Many of them—including the idea of future rulers and saviours, the Dragon-Flower Assembly, the City of Clouds, or the rescue of the elect from coming catastrophes and the advent of a new time—were not discussed in the literary discourses of the elites, if they were mentioned at all. Should we suppose that there were secret sectarian communities transmitting through the centuries these and other ideas in the underground? I do not think this is a very convincing conjecture. It rather seems that the elements from which most popular religious movements assembled their teachings were part of a vast stock of symbols and ideas available in popular culture. To be sure, not everyone used these symbols and held such beliefs. But they belonged to the common lore circulating

within society. Since circulation and exchange of ideas depended on social interaction, the distribution of certain symbols and ideas was certainly not equal in all parts of the Chinese world. There were linguistic barriers impeding oral communication between different dialect areas, which fostered the diversity of regional traditions. And there were social barriers that reduced communication between separate social settings, which therefore tended to form different cultural milieus of shared ideas and values.

The internal differentiation—regional and social—of the popular culture did not, however, lead to completely isolated subcultures. Certain elements, such as local deities or legends, may have been unknown in other parts of the country, or outside specific linguistic or professional groups. But to the extent that there was communication between such subcultures, there was also an exchange of symbols and ideas, however limited it was in every single instance. Given the long duration of contact and exchange relationships within Chinese society—which were promoted by trade, migrations, wars, and marriages—popular culture as a whole was a huge reservoir of diverse symbols and ideas floating within this cultural space. Popular religious beliefs, like any other popular system of symbols, drew selectively from this reservoir to form condensed clusters. Although the range of available religious ideas was wide, it was not unlimited. It is therefore not surprising that many symbols appeared in different religious groups even if they were not genetically related to each other. There were certain types of beliefs that belonged, as it were, to the same family and typically clustered with various other symbols and ideas. Thus, the belief in coming catastrophes easily combined with the hope of belonging to the elected few who will escape approaching destruction. In any case, religious groups that preached this hope were significantly more attractive and therefore more successful than those predicting one's own annihilation. For the main themes of religious beliefs—be they the expectation of a new world, personal salvation in another form of existence, or blessing in present life—there were sets of symbols and clusters of ideas available that could be arranged in various combinations. Depending on the general religious climate of the time and the social milieu in which popular movements arose, their symbolic language would sound either more Buddhist or more Daoist. In many cases their religious message was indeed not very different from what was believed in some Buddhist or Daoist circles. They all were part of the same popular religious culture that

allowed for mutual exchange of symbols and ideas. It was only from the perspective of the elite culture, its distinct literary traditions, and state-approved institutions that Chinese religious life appeared as neatly divided into different teachings. Of course, there was a variety of different religious attitudes and beliefs, but religious diversification did not simply trace the boundaries of the three official teachings. Below the level of the literary culture of the elites and their control, many arrangements were possible that combined and condensed the symbols dispersed in popular culture.

Social and Cultural Milieus

We may describe the processes by which new religious groups emerged within popular culture in a more theoretical language. Religious beliefs are not historical entities that have an existence of their own. They are rather produced and have to be reproduced continuously by being communicated and exchanged in social interaction. The exchange of symbols is therefore restricted by the structure of social relationships. In any society there are social fields marked by a certain intensity of social interaction and exchange. Elementary social fields may result from local, professional, family, and other enduring relationships. As interaction and exchange are concentrated within social fields, there is a concentration of certain symbols and ideas, too. On the other hand, social fields are not closed structures. Any individual may act in various social fields, as member of a local community, a professional or kinship group, or possibly a religious community. Thus, social networks are formed, which account for the distribution of symbols and ideas beyond the limits of a single social field. Most social networks, however, do not exchange beliefs in the first place. Trade networks, for instance, are concerned primarily with the exchange of material goods and may connect individuals who maintain very different beliefs. Still, there are other networks where symbolic exchange is more intense, such as networks of literati, artists, politicians, or people interested in religion. Such networks will usually show a greater homogeneity in beliefs and values. We may call a social network with a significant degree of symbolic exchange and therefore a concentration of shared beliefs and

values a *social* or *cultural milieu*. We thus speak of literate, artistic, agrarian, or religious milieus, to name just a few.

The concept of *social milieu* allows to see religious beliefs as independent of identifiable social groups on the one hand, and distinct religious traditions on the other. Participation in a religious milieu does not mean membership in a religious community, and the beliefs and values communicated within a religious milieu need not represent a fixed teaching. We have therefore to reconsider such notions as religious *traditions* or the *continuity* of religious beliefs. Similar beliefs and symbols appearing at different times or in different places do not always imply historical continuity and ongoing traditions. Groups and movements were formed continuously within various religious milieus. They were social condensations that established some boundaries to the surrounding milieu. Boundaries could be marked by formal membership, participation in common rituals, worship of a particular deity or scripture, or adherence to a certain teacher. Consequently, not only new social fields of structured interaction emerged, but also intense symbolic exchange. The condensation of social relationships went hand in hand with a condensation of symbols and ideas. As has been noted, some ideas easily combined to clusters that may be considered the nuclei of belief systems. Most religious groups that emerged in this way were probably not very innovative and shared the majority of symbols and ideas with the surrounding religious milieu. To maintain the boundaries demanded a certain amount of religious commitment of its members. Since it is difficult to keep mobilizing commitment and to recruit new members who secure continuation, voluntary religious groups easily dissolved again in the popular religious milieu from which they emerged. The ideas, however, did not vanish with the social organizations. They rather remained within the cultural space, ready to be rearranged in new aggregations. Beliefs could thus be transmitted without being part of specific religious traditions.

The concept of social or cultural milieu leads us to reconsider the dichotomy of popular and elite culture. As has been observed, popular religious culture was not an illiterate culture, nor was it the culture of the poor and destitute. There were of course social milieus consisting mainly of illiterate and fortuneless people. But there were also milieus that included landlords, merchants, government clerks or local literati. And there were milieus of scholars, officials, aristocrats, or high clerics. To regard the latter milieus as representing the "elite culture" and to

separate them from "popular culture" is convenient, but it obscures the fact that they acted in the same cultural space. Social and cultural milieus were not isolated, as many individuals participated in different milieus. Local officials could have relationships with landlords and literati, scholars were part of the social milieu in their home districts, military officers knew the milieu of soldiers as well as of officials. To be sure, some milieus were fairly distant from each other and rarely overlapped, but probably few members of the elites never had any contact with other milieus during their life. Hence, the elites partook in the "popular" culture even if they formed their own social milieus. From the point of view of social structure, the milieus of the elites were comparable to other social milieus, such as merchants or artisans.[2]

This may seem a daring generalization, since the structure of Chinese society and culture changed considerably during the past two thousand years and with it the relations between elites and populace. However, the history of popular religious movements shows that even in the first millennium the cultural milieus of the political elites were not sealed against influences from other milieus. The early Daoist movements gained their followers not primarily from elite milieus, yet their leaders often maintained close relations with them. The same is true for medieval Buddhism; and during the Song and Yuan dynasties, the White Lotus and White Cloud movements were also supported by members of the elites, as were some popular sects of the late Ming. This is not to say that these popular religious movements were part of the elite culture, which they obviously were not. It rather means that the distinction between elite and popular culture is not primarily based on social structure. To belong to the social milieu of the powerful, rich, and educated does not exclude participation in the popular culture. Even emperors could consult spirit-mediums or diviners, not to speak of the female members of the imperial court. Popular religion penetrated all layers of the society. "Popular culture", therefore, cannot be defined as

[2] Closer analysis would make it possible to distinguish different types of social milieus. The main factors of differentiation seem to be segmentation (based on locality, ethnicity and kinship, and language), function (such as professional or religious milieus) and hierarchy (based on the distribution of power). Note that segmentation, functional differentiation, and hierarchy are not mutually exclusive. An individual could participate in different social and cultural milieus based on various factors or a combination of them. Thus, during the Qing dynasty, an individual could at the same time belong to milieus based on ethnicity and language (e.g. as a Manchu, Han, Tibetan) and to milieus based on function (as soldier, monk, merchant) and hierarchy (as commoner, official, member of the high aristocracy).

the culture of the lower classes, nor is "elite culture" simply the culture of the higher classes. On the basis of social structure we may distinguish different social and cultural milieus, namely, networks of social relationships with some degree of shared beliefs and values. In order to grasp the distinction between elite and popular culture we have, however, to go beyond the analysis of social structure and social milieus. We must consider cultural systems.

Elite Culture and the Order of Discourses

A *cultural system* can be defined as a system of symbols comprising cognitive and normative statements related to each other. Thus, the teachings of a developed religion, which usually contain cognitive statements explaining certain aspects of the world of men and gods, as well as normative statements explaining how to behave in this world, form a cultural system. Cultural systems are not defined by social structure, although they are not completely independent of it. As an example we may consider the explanations given by Buddhism, which formed a cultural system accepted in various social milieus and by persons in different social positions. While Buddhism clearly was part of the elite culture, as a cultural system it was not defined socially as being maintained by the ruling elites instead of the common people. The same is true for Daoism and Confucianism, which both as cultural systems were not confined to the social milieus of the ruling classes but were also accepted in popular milieus. Hence, to say that the traditions of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism were part of the elite culture does not mean that they were restricted to the social milieus of the elites. This corresponds to our earlier observation that popular religion conversely was not restricted to lower class milieus.

If the distinction between popular and elite culture is not based on social structure, how then can we maintain it as a means of historical and sociological analysis? In which sense can we say that popular religions were not part of the elite culture? To answer this question we have to consider elite and popular culture as complex cultural systems instead of consisting of cultural milieus. A cultural system does not depend on the actual beliefs and values maintained by individuals or groups but has, as it were, an existence of its own. To take for instance

Confucianism as a cultural system does not mean that any Confucian scholar actually held as his personal belief all statements made in the Confucian tradition. The same holds for Buddhism and Daoism, and for the elite culture as a whole. As a cultural system, the elite culture consists of all statements that are taken as being part of it, which is not the same as what members of the elites believed at any given time. For, as we have seen, members of the ruling class could maintain beliefs that were not part of the elite culture, whereas individuals not belonging to elite milieus could nevertheless accept beliefs of the elite culture.

To say that the elite culture consists of all statements that are taken as being part of it seems to be tautological. At least it presupposes that we can specify the rules by which to decide whether a statement is part of the elite culture. I would argue that such rules existed, although they were open to change. While more detailed analysis has to await future research, some observations can be made to illustrate the direction of further investigation. As a starting point, Michel Foucault's analysis of the order of discourses is useful. Foucault argues that in any society the production of discourses is selected, organized, and canalized by certain procedures to control the powers and dangers of discourses.[3] We can take the statements of the elite culture as being part of discourses restricted by certain rules in a way that allows to exclude other statements that do not belong to it.

To illustrate this rather abstract line of thought, we can consider Confucian discourses, which without doubt were part of the elite culture. Following Foucault it is possible to distinguish procedures of exclusion, defining which statements are not accepted within the Confucian discourse, and procedures of internal control, defining how statements of the Confucian discourse have to be organized. Such rules are usually not made explicit and can, therefore, be found only by analysing the structure of discourses. In the case of the Confucian discourses, one rule of exclusion seems to be fairly clear: It is the exclusion of certain religious themes, such as questions concerning the supernatural, ghosts and spirits, and the otherworld.[4] Although the rules of discourse were

[3] Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours: leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970*, Paris: Gallimard, 1971, p. 10 f.

[4] The *locus classicus* of this exclusion is found in the *Analects* (XI, 11), where Confucius is reported to have refused talking about serving ghosts and spirits, and about (the fate of) the dead.

not the same at all times, it appears that the exclusion of certain supernatural questions was characteristic for most Confucian discourses. This is not to say that Confucians never talked about ghosts and spirits, or that they personally not believed in them, but that discussing these matters was not part of Confucian discourses. It was possible to talk about them in other discourses: Daoist, Buddhist, or popular. Closer analysis would certainly allow to detect other rules of exclusion in certain Confucian discourses, but the example should be clear enough to illustrate the point.

As to the procedures of internal control, we may refer to the structure of discourses and arguments. Many Confucian discourses were organized as commentaries to authoritative scriptures. Which scriptures were considered most authoritative was open to change; but there was always an established set of canonical writings whose authority was unquestioned. An argument founded on the authority of the *Lotus Sūtra* would, however, not have been accepted within a Confucian discourse, while in Buddhist discourses it was. There were thus certain internal rules that allow to distinguish Confucian from other discourses. The definition of canonical scriptures served as an implicit rule of exclusion. An example is the *Taiping jing,* which was presented to the throne in the second century. It was rejected by court scholars under the argument that it was not based on the canonical scriptures (*bu jing*). They did not accept it as a contribution to the elite discourse.

Procedures of exclusion and procedures of internal control had the same effect of delimiting Confucian discourses within the elite culture. More systematic research would certainly reveal a considerable number of such rules, which varied in different times. Among them are certain requirements of literary style. Mastering the literary style of elite discourses was always a prerequisite of being accepted as participant. There were also formal qualifications of the participants, such as status and gender. Women were not qualified; and it appears that during the Ming dynasty to hold a higher degree was a formal requirement for being fully accepted as participant in a Confucian discourse of the elites, as can be seen from Lin Zhao'en's case. More thorough investigations would probably make it possible to distinguish the rules of various sub-discourses within Confucianism. For our present purpose it suffices, however, that there were rules allowing to decide which statements were part of Confucian discourses. And it would likewise be

possible to find rules defining Buddhist and Daoist discourses within the elite culture.

It should be recalled that "elite culture" as used here is not understood as a social milieu defined by networks of interaction and shared beliefs and values, although it is evident that most participants in the discourses of the elite culture were in fact members of the higher classes. However, the consumers of the products of the elite culture belonged to all classes. To some extent the elite culture gradually penetrated the society. Seen as a cultural system consisting of cognitive and normative statements, it described what was real and what was right. Put differently, a cultural system defines reality as it is and as it ought to be. The power of discourses rests on their power to define reality. A cultural system explains the world or certain aspects of it. The explanations of the elite culture claimed validity not only for members of the political or intellectual elites; they rather claimed universal validity. And to the extent that the ruling elites succeeded in propagating and spreading their definitions of reality, both cognitive and normative, the explanations of the elite culture were accepted in the society at large. The great importance that Chinese elites gave to the idea of educating the people can be understood as an attempt to secure universal acceptance to the explanations of the elite culture and to eliminate alternative definitions of reality.

It is the power of discourses to define reality that makes it necessary to control them. The rules delimiting elite discourses allowed to control them by restricting the number of participants, defining their qualifications, excluding certain themes, and regulating the structure of arguments. These and other procedures of control channelled the discourses that produced the cognitive and normative orientations on which acceptable behaviour was to be based. To the extent that discourses were directly or indirectly controlled by the ruling elites, they were part of the elite culture. The strategies of control were diverse and cannot be analysed here in detail. A most important factor was the allocation of status, prestige, power, and wealth, which integrated certain individuals or groups into the social milieus of the ruling elites. Not only Confucian scholars, but also the higher Buddhist and Daoist clergy were in this way brought closer to the power elite and at the same time submitted to its control. The prestige and power of the leading intellectuals, which depended on their support by the political elites, put them into a position to supervise and influence the discourses

of their cultural systems. Their's was the power to define the rules of discourse. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism were part of the elite culture because and to the extent that their discourses were controlled by the ruling class, however indirect this control was. This control secured that their explanations of the world did not undermine the existing order of things and the structure of power.

Elite Culture and Popular Religion

We may construct the concepts of *elite culture* and *popular culture* as ideal types taking the control of discourses by the ruling elites as the distinctive feature. Both produce cognitive and normative orientations that guide human behaviour. Both are internally differentiated, they comprise various and in some respects contradictory cultural systems: the three great traditions in the case of the elite culture, and a number of regional cultures and minor religious traditions in the case of the popular culture. And both influence each other as they are communicated within the same cultural space. However, unlike the discourses of the elite culture, popular discourses are outside the control of the ruling elites.

This ideal typology can be made more flexible by considering the two types as the extreme poles on a scale. On the one end of the scale would be those discourses that were most controlled by state supervision, requirements of style and formal argument, and ritual qualification of participants. The Confucian discourses of eminent scholar-officials during the Ming dynasty would be very close to this pole. The other end of the scale would be occupied by popular discourses beyond the reach of state control. The popular lore based on local legends or the myths of ethnic minorities were near to this pole. In between we find a wide spectrum of discourses with different degrees of state control. Some were near to the elite pole, as the Buddhist discourses of the official clergy whose writings were included in canonical collections supervised by the state. Others approached the popular pole, such as the teachings of village monks and priests who made a living as ritual specialists, healers or exorcists, and occasionally became the founders of new sects. These latter discourses were not controlled to the same degree as discourses of elite Buddhism and Daoism.

The typology proposed here overcomes some difficulties connected with a dichotomic juxtaposition of popular and elite culture. By separating the concept *culture* from social structure, it is possible to understand that there is no contradiction between popular culture and the social milieus of the higher classes. Above all the female members of the upper classes, who usually were excluded from the discourses of the elite culture, often embraced beliefs and practices of the popular culture. More thorough research would probably show that the same was true for many male members of upper class milieus. By defining *elite culture* not by content but by certain rules of discourses, it is possible to grasp the difference between popular and elite culture. To speak of *popular* religion does not mean that these religious beliefs and practices were different from those maintained by members of the elites (they often were not); it rather means that the beliefs and practices were explained in popular discourses that were not submitted to the discursive rules of the elite culture.

It should be apparent that *popular religion* is a gradational concept. There was no clear line of demarcation between popular religion and elite culture, but fluid transition. This is evident if we talk of *popular* Buddhism or *popular* Daoism. However, the more "popular" religious discourses were, that is, the less they were controlled by the rules of elite discourses, the more they were free to deviate from the cognitive and normative orientations of the elite culture. In the discourses of popular culture and popular religion, reality could be described in other ways than in elite discourses. The world as defined in popular and elite discourses was not exactly the same. Popular religious discourses, for instance, often took the existence and working of demons and evil spirits for granted, who arbitrarily could cause illness and misfortune and had therefore to be appeased with offerings. In elite discourses, demons and evil spirits were seen as being subordinated to the moral order of the cosmos, the law of karmic retribution, or divine hierarchies. The rules of elite discourses excluded realities that were not submitted to the natural order of things. Propitiating demons with offerings relied on a view of reality that was different from, and at the same time denied the validity of elite definitions of reality. In order to maintain the universal validity of their own definitions of reality, the advocates of the elite culture had to suppress such illicit cults.

Not only the discourses of the elites but also popular discourses had the power to define reality. They supplied cognitive and normative

orientations that guided human action. Such power could be dangerous if it was uncontrolled. The control to which elite discourses were submitted secured that their definitions of reality corresponded to the understanding and the interests of the ruling elites. Under ordinary conditions these rules of discourse changed only slowly, which prevented revolutionary innovations within the elite culture. However, popular religion was by definition largely outside the control of the power elite. Even if there were unceasing attempts to restrict and tame it by submitting it to the control of officials and clerical institutions, popular religious discourses could form anew at any time and in any place. It was impossible to eliminate the symbols and ideas floating within the cultural space, which provided an inexhaustible reservoir from which popular religions drew their inspiration. Particularly new religious movements, which seemed to emerge out of a sudden, easily escaped government notice and could thus develop a social and cultural dynamism. Their discourses were not restricted by the rules of the elite culture and were, therefore, free to conceive a reality more suitable to the needs of their followers than what was offered by the elite culture. There was room for alternative conceptions of reality that gave meaning and hope for many who could not find meaning or hope in the explanations propagated by the ruling elites.

It appears that the dynamics that some popular religious movements developed was in many cases due to their ability to conceive reality in a way that was different from what the elite culture maintained. Popular discourses were free to ignore one of the main taboos to be observed in elite discourses: the idea that the world could be completely different, or that the world is in reality different from what is commonly believed. Like a red thread we find in the history of popular religious movements the idea that the present world is imperfect and corrupted. The *Taiping jing* saw in the accumulation of sins the cause of misery and premature death, and the foreshadow of final destruction. For Faqing and militant sects of the Maitreyist tradition, the world was corrupted and ruled by demons who had to be wiped out to prepare the descent of Maitreya and the coming of a new perfect rule. Less militant movements envisioned a world where the just and faithful would live in peace, while evildoers and the oppressive were doomed to annihilation. But it was not only millenarian and apocalyptic ideas that time and again inspired beliefs in a better form of existence. That the world in its present condition is not the real and final world could also be expressed in more subtle

ways. The symbol of the native place to which the soul will return, the transcendental realm of the Mother, or the Complete Emptiness in Luo Menghong's writings all refer to a reality that is more valuable and, as it were, more real than the present world. Thus, many popular religious discourses conceived reality in a way that was different from the conceptions of the elite culture; but since at the same time they put into question the existing order of things, it was a challenge to it and had to face opposition from those who wanted to maintain it.

APPENDIX

ON THE TWO VERSIONS OF THE JIULIAN JING

The *Jiulian jing* is one of the most influential *baojuan* of the Ming and Qing. It seems to represent a sectarian tradition that evolved at the same time in which Patriarch Luo was active. Its relationship to the Luo tradition is still obscure and deserves further investigation.

There are two different scriptures known as *Huangji jindan* or *Jiulian jing:* The *Huangji jindan jiulian zhengxin guizhen huanxiang baojuan* 皇機金丹九蓮正信皈真還鄉寶卷 in two *juan* ("short" *Jiulian jing*) and the *Foshuo Huangji jindan jiulian zhengxing guizhen baojuan* 佛說皇機金丹九蓮證性皈真寶卷 in four *juan* ("long" *Jiulian jing*). An edition of the "short" (or "old") *Jiulian jing* dated 1523 is reprinted in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, two later editions (Ming and Republican) in *MJZJ*, vol. 4. Two editions of the long *Jiulian jing* (Ming and undated) are reprinted in *MJZJ*, vol. 5. The version used by the *Xiantian jiao* in Taiwan, which is reprinted in modern type-setting by Lin Wanchuan,[1] has the same name as the short *Jiulian jing*, but actually is the long *Jiulian jing*.[2] According to *Xiantian dao* traditions, its author is Huang Dehui 黃德煇, which is impossible if the edition reprinted in *MJZJ*, vol. 5 really is a Ming edition, for the earliest birth date given for Huang Dehui is 1624.[3] According to Sawada Mizuho, however, he lived from 1684 to 1750.[4] Sawada quotes from the title of a 1909 edition of the short *Jiulian jing* where it is stated that the book was written by the ninth patriarch who was a transformation of *Yuanshi Tianzun*, which Sawada interprets as referring to Huang Dehui. This, however, cannot be right since the

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[1] Lin Wanchuan, *Xiantian dao yanjiu*, pp. II/27–203.

[2] The text is divided into 32 chapters and seems to correspond to the long version reprinted as *Foshuo Huangji jindan jiulian zhengxing guizhen baojuan* 佛說皇機金丹九蓮證性皈真寶卷 in *MJZJ*, vol. 5, pp. 35–264. This reprint is said to be a reproduction of a Ming edition. The second plate in Lin Wanchuan's book provides of photograph of the original copy in possession of the *Xiantian dao* in Taiwan. The photograph shows that the title of the book is that of the long version. It is unclear why Lin refers to it by the title of the short (i.e. old) version.

[3] Lin Wanchuan, *ibid.*, p. I/130.

[4] *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū*, p. 110.

short *Jiulian jing* existed already in 1523. According to Lian Lichang there was even an earlier edition.[5]

It remains open whether Huang Dehui could be the author of the long *Jiulian jing*. Certainly not if the *BJCJ*, vol. 5, pp. 35 ff reprint is based on a Ming edition. However, Lin Wanchuan states that the copy stored by the *Xiantian dao* in Taiwan, which seems to be the master copy of the reprint of the "Ming" edition in *MJZJ* (cf. the photograph reproduced as the second plate in Lin Wanchuan's book), appeared after 1690. This view seems to be based on the assumption that the author of the book was Huang Dehui, who according to *Xiantian dao* tradition died in 1690. The main argument[6] for seeing a connection with Huang Dehui is a cryptic verse in chapter 32 (*MJZJ*, vol. 5, p. 250a) which apparently gives biographical dates of someone who was a ninth transformation. If one assumes that the year designations refer to the seventeenth century, this someone was born in 1624 and died in 1690, which are exactly the dates of Huang Dehui according to the *Xiantian dao* tradition. However, it seems that this tradition is just based on this passage. According to Sawada, Huang Dehui lived from 1684 to 1750, which corresponds better to the dates of his successor, who died in 1784.[7] However, the dates given by Sawada seem to be based on the assumption that Huang Dehui was the author of the *Jiulian jing*.[8] Furthermore, exactly the same year designations appear already in the short *Jiulian jing* of 1523.[9] Although the verses show some variations, they both refer to a ninth transformation. This suggests that Huang Dehui's dates as given in the *Xiantian dao* tradition were shaped after the verses of the long *Jiulian jing*, which in turn were mostly borrowed from the short *Jiulian jing*. Since the text refers to someone being the ninth transformation, probably a teacher or sect

[5] "«*Jiulian jing*» *kao*," pp. 115 f.

[6] Cf. Wang Jianchuan, "*Xiantian jiao qianqi shi chu tan*," p. 86.

[7] Ma/Han, p. 1108.

[8] The same dates are given by Yu Songqing 喻松青, "Huang Dehui «Huangji jindan jiulian zhengxin guizhen huanxiang baojuan» 黃德煇《皇極金丹九蓮正信皈真還鄉寶卷》," in *Minjian mimi zongjiao jingjuan yanjiu* 民間秘密宗教經卷研究, Taibei: Lianjing, 1994, pp. 213–249: 213. Although no sources are given for these dates, Sawada and Yu also seem to rely on the cryptic dates of the mysterious ninth transformation given in the *Jiulian jing*, who is said to have been born in a *jiazi* 甲子 year and to have died in a *gengwu* 庚午 year. While the *Xiantian dao* traditions interprets this as 1624 to 1690, Sawada and Yu suppose it was sixty years later, i.e., 1684 to 1750.

[9] Ch. 23 in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 433.

founder, it was interpreted in the *Xiantian dao* tradition as referring to its ninth patriarch Huang Dehui.

Ma Xisha and Han Bingfang interpret the same passage as referring to Wang Sen.[10] They omit, however, the last sentence that clearly states a *gengwu* 庚午 year as the year of death. This would be 1630, but Wang Sen died in 1619.

In any case, the years *jiazi* and *gengshen*, which apparently refer to the birth and death of the teacher of the *Jiulian jing,* appear already in the 1523 edition of the short (i.e., old) *Jiulian jing*. They can, therefore, refer neither to Huang Dehui nor to Wang Sen. This furthermore implies that the various life dates given for Huang Dehui (1624–1690 or 1684–1750), are not reliable since they are based on the assumption that he is the teacher referred to in the *Jiulian jing.*

The old version of the *Jiulian jing* dated 1523 states that it is a reprint, which means that there must have been an earlier version.[11] Lian Lichang, who discusses this book,[12] is in possession of an edition which he believes is the original print. According to his analysis, the book must have been written after 1498, because it refers to the year *wuwu* 戊午 of the Ming dynasty as the present time. Not all of his arguments are completely convincing. He argues that the *Jiulian baojuan* mentions four teachers who all lived during the eras Hongzhi (1488–1505) and Zhengde (1506–1521). This does, however, only provide a *terminus post quem* and does not support the conclusion that the book was written at that time. Moreover, it remains obscure from which sources Lian knows the life time of these teachers. The *Tongzhou zhi,* to which he refers, does not give any dates.[13] The main argument, however, is better founded. Since the book mentions the year *wuwu* 戊午 of the Ming dynasty (1498) it must have been finished after that year.[14] On the other hand, it states that the teacher who was the ninth transformation

[10] Ma/Han, p. 1099. For Wang Sen's supposed authorship of the *Jiulian jing* see Ma/Han, pp. 613–616. Cf. also Wang Jianchuan, "Lüelun xiancun de er zhong «Jiulian jing» baojuan," p. 313.

[11] Cf. *BJCJ,* vol. 8, pp. 237, 482.

[12] Lian Lichang, "«Jiulian jing» kao."

[13] Cf. *Tongzhou zhi* 通州志 (Guangxu 5 [1879]). Taibei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1968, *j.* 8, pp. 1296 f.

[14] The year *wuwu* cannot refer to 1438 because the book mentions the monk Jingkong (Jingkong seng 淨空僧), who lived during the Zhengde era (1506–1521), cf. Ma/Han, p. 557.

was born in a *jiazi* year and died in a *gengshen* year.[15] Since the *gengshen* year after 1498 was 1510, the first edition of the book must have appeared between 1510 and 1523 (the year of the reprint). We can, therefore, conclude that the teacher to whom the *Jiulian jing* refers lived from 1444 to 1510 and was thus a contemporary of Luo Menghong.

It may be that the tradition from which the *Jiulian jing* emerged, which seems to have belonged to a similar milieu as the *Huangji jieguo baojuan* of 1430, at an early date interacted with the Luo movement. The symbol *wuwei* is prominent in the *Jiulian jing*, and the author of the scripture is called *Wuwei zu* (*Wuwei*-Patriarch, or Patriarch of Non-Action).[16] Furthermore, among the successors of the *Wuwei*-Patriarch a *Nanwu* Patriarch (*Nanwu zu* 南無祖) is mentioned,[17] who according to the *Longhua jing* was the founder of the *Nanwu jiao,* Patriarch Sun, or Sun Zhenkong.[18] This Sun Zhenkong is considered the fourth successor of Patriarch Luo in a sectarian line related in the *Foshuo sanhuang chufen tiandi tanshi baojuan*.[19] If this tradition was correct, it would prove a relationship between the Luo movement and the *Jiulian jing*. Still, the available evidence is inconclusive, and much more research is needed to trace the connections between various traditions and scriptures.[20]

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[15] Ch. 23, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 433.

[16] Ch. 14, in *BJCJ*, vol. 8, p. 266, ch. 23 (p. 419). Cf. also ch. 17 (pp. 330–333) where the teaching is called The Golden Elixir of Non-Action (*wuwei jindan* 無為金丹).

[17] Ch. 8, in *BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 269.

[18] *Longhua jing,* ch. 23, p. 736b.

[19] Quoted in Sawada, *Zōho hōkan no kenkyū*, p. 330 f.

[20] To give a further example of the difficulties and apparent contradictions in the sources: The *Jiulian jing* also mentions as disciple of the *Wuwei* Patriarch a person called Wuming 悟明 (*BJCJ,* vol. 8, p. 269). A Wuming Patriarch is listed in the *Longhua jing* as founder of the *Wuming jiao* 悟明教 (*Longhua jing*, ch. 23, p. 737a). A biography of the Wuming Patriarch is contained in the *Xiaoshi Wuming zu guanxingjue baojuan* 銷釋悟明祖貫行覺寶卷 (*Precious Scroll Explaining the Life and Enlightenment of the Wuming-Patriarch*, in *MJZJ*, vol. 4, pp. 413–470). According to this account (cf. pp. 441a, line 7, 442b, line 1), the monk Wuming was active during the Hongzhi-era (1488–1505). But it is also said that he transmitted the *Hongyang* 紅陽 teaching (p. 440a, last line, cf. also p. 425b, line 10 for *Hongyang** 弘陽). Founder of the *Hongyang* jiao* was Piaogao in the late sixteenth century. However, in this scripture the Wuming Patriarch is associated with two other sect leaders, Puguang and Pujing (pp. 426b, line 11, 427a, lines 10, 13). They also lived in the late sixteenth century, but were the wife and the daughter of Puming, the founder of the *Huangtian jiao*. If Wuming lived during the Hongzhi-era, he cannot have been related to Puguang and Pujing. And what role does the *Hongyang* jiao* play in this context? Thus, there are more questions than answers about Wuming's identity. The scripture needs more thorough study, but it illustrates the difficulties in reconstructing connections within the sectarian milieu.

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